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THE BOROUGHMONGER

Ralph
By R. H. MOTTRAM

BOSTON



1929

LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY

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TO
ERNEST A. KENT
OF
THE NORWICH SOCIETY

CONTENTS

I	<i>Carstone Place</i>	3
II	<i>The Rectory</i>	25
III	<i>The George</i>	48
IV	<i>The Residence</i>	72
V	<i>The Moot Hall</i>	97
VI	<i>Bye-Ways</i>	125
VII	<i>The Barge</i>	143
VIII	<i>The Office</i>	163
IX	<i>The Church</i>	182
X	<i>The Market Place</i>	206
XI	<i>The Club</i>	232
XII	<i>The Committee Room</i>	257
XIII	<i>The Glebe</i>	281
XIV	<i>Foreign Parts</i>	304

The Boroughmonger

“Penitus toto divisos orbe Britannos”

VERGIL

I

Carstone Place

THE library at Carstone Place had been planned upon a scale that was generous. There had been no reason to stint the area it occupied, or the cost of its erection, and its dimensions did honour to the mansion (larger than many a palace) of which it formed a deliberately proportionate part. Its actual length was apparently increased by the three tall windows, uniform with the other hundred or so of the façade, that broke its outside wall from floor to ceiling. Its breadth was a due half of that length, its height commensurate, and neither was lessened by the tall book-cases which covered the remaining walls, between the doorways and fireplace, reaching up to the heathen deities, and clouds and Cupids that decorated the coffered ceiling. On that winter evening of the eighteen-thirties, it seemed immense, by the light of a great fire, and two tall candles. Yet its sombre, fitfully revealed immensity did nothing to dwarf the figure of its sole inhabitant, well sunk in his high-backed armchair, between the fire and the table that supported the two candles, by the light of which he was alternately reading and musing. There was nothing gigantic in his stature, nor massive in the broadish head of aquiline profile, to make him seem so sufficient an occupant of such stateliness. It must have been rather his air of natural and unassumed

ease and custom. He was at home in a place for which the word was grotesquely inadequate. The great apartment sheltered, the chair supported, the candles lighted, and the fire warmed some small portion of his daily leisure, adequately, as if designed for that end only.

The walls of Carstone Place were too thick, its distances too great, to allow a murmur of the outside world, or even of the less stately quarters of the pile, to penetrate to the library. News was brought, as from some remote sphere, through doors opened and shut with decorum by liveried servitude. For a full minute the emissary from other regions might be perceived in the shadows, traversing the spaces of the library and halting within the circle of light shed by the candles. The figure in the chair raised its eyes, to learn that "The Reverend Mr. Burgess and the young gentleman have arrived!" and dropped them again, but not for long. That figure became animated, raised eyes and voice too, hailing back the emissary who had passed down half the vista, to the door.

"Tell Mr. Burgess I will see him at once!"

"My Lord, Mr. Burgess is making his toilet!"

"Here — now!"

The emissary departed in mute acquiescence. The figure in the chair became once more immobility enthroned. But the volume, upon the leather binding of which the name of a Latin author was tooled, now lay unheeded beside the candlesticks. The fine,

beringed hands drooped upon the arms of the chair, the pale inscrutable face regarded the fire.

Presently, however, the door opened again, admitting the sound of footsteps, whose haste was moderated by respect for the presence; the announcement, from the shadows beyond, "My Lord, the Reverend Mr. Burgess!" called attention to a person advancing with chastened speed into the light. Now the figure in the chair cast off immobility, rose, motioned to a seat, became a sentient human being, very noble, urbanely condescending, but human for all that.

The Reverend Mr. Burgess did not presume upon the fact. He seated himself in an attitude dictated by the profound attention he paid to his host, rather than by his own desire for repose. In doing so it became clear how two distinct standards governed his thoughts and actions. His sacred calling was masked in black clothes that would have been respectable in any mundane company up to royalty. His holy mind was adapted to worldly commerce, by a nicely limited intelligence. His age might have been anything from a premature forty to a well-preserved sixty, and his own personal ambitions nonexistent.

He waited for His Lordship to inquire:

"I trust you are not over-fatigued!"

"By no means. We have made a fair journey!"

"Well, Mr. Burgess ——" here His Lordship became remotely interested, distantly familiar, "what do you make of him?"

Again, Mr. Burgess did not presume. His expression implied that anything His Lordship desired could be made. His lips uttered:

"A charming young gentleman!"

"Manners?"

"And address are pleasing!"

"Cultivated?"

"The humanities ——"

"Does he show any especial ——?"

Once more, Mr. Burgess, very noncommittal.

"The enthusiasms of youth!"

"Which?"

"Subversive!"

"Hah!"

Silence. His Lordship was thinking, Mr. Burgess waiting upon him. Then:

"Pray, Mr. Burgess, does he resemble his father?"

Something evidently lay across Mr. Burgess' throat for a second, but only for that:

"I had not the pleasure ——"

"He is the son of a steward of mine — Carston — a distant relative!"

"Oh! Carston. I should hardly say so!"

Silence. Noiseless, a servant appears in the circle of light. His Lordship is made aware that dinner is served. Becoming almost human again, His Lordship, faintly cordial, makes a gesture, to which Mr. Burgess bows, declining too much honour, and follows him. Dinner is served not in the great hall of many a feast, but in a room comparatively small and

intimate. At one end are pillars, between which screens half hide the activities of the servants. The table, laid for three only, before another blazing fire, is brilliant with candles, and yet more brilliance from the sconces that mark the centre of narrow panels, between dark old pictures on the walls. In this illumination the silver, gilt, glass and napery blaze and wink. His Lordship looks about him. The liveried men stir and whisper, and before His Lordship formulates the observation that looks so imminent, usher in a young man. His Lordship indicates the seat to his right, and has Mr. Burgess on his left. His Lordship's greeting is reflective, the youth's shy and respectful. The first three courses, ample and elaborate, pass in silence. The partakers seem rather bent upon mutual observation than upon conversation. About the brilliant table, the footmen move with precise, silent discipline, as if equally absorbed by what was being eaten and drunk, hardly regarding the faces of the diners, forestalling every want. Not for menials to notice that triangular contest of penetration that seems to be going on. His Lordship may be seen casting, for him, unusually interested glances at the young man, who on his side is equally interested in His Lordship, and both appear unwilling for or distrustful of speech, and avoid each other's eyes. But the Reverend Mr. Burgess looks even more intrigued, and if possible less ready to show it. How circumspectly he compares the other two, feature with feature,

never letting either of them catch him at it. Mr. Burgess alone withstands the subtle wooing of the perfectly chosen and cooked dishes, the continuously changed and filled glasses of wines well kept and delicately served. His Lordship becoming mildly expansive, the youth responds, with flattering eagerness. First there are obvious inquiries as to the incidents of the tour, and the progress of the studies that have been pursued under Mr. Burgess' tutelage. His Lordship adopts the tone of lofty unanswerable banter that befits one to whom all such things are rather trivial, although becoming to youth and lowly station, even dropping into occasional reminiscence or remark for the benefit of Mr. Burgess. Mr. Burgess replies with perfect seriousness and brevity, never for an instant presuming to share His Lordship's vein of dim humour. The youth is more easily drawn. The dinner is possibly a new experience, certainly a noticeable one, after the chances of foreign travel, and the fare of a student however privileged. He lifts the high broad forehead, the pronounced and shapely nose, both of which reflect, in an odd way, those of His Lordship. He indulges in longer and more flowing sentences, shows aptitude in description, and frequent flashes of what Mr. Burgess has described as the enthusiasms of youth; is plainly observant of things, and even more of people, but especially of things and people that comply with some preconceived notion budding and flowering in a fertile, unsoured young mind. He talks so much

that he slows down the noiseless rapidity of the service, finds himself left speaking with food on his plate and expectant hands removing it. His Lordship is indulgent, smiles, and rather leads him on, taking Mr. Burgess by sundry looks and asides into his confidence, and splitting the triangle into the pair of age and experience, nodding together over single youth.

The servants retire, the gentlemen sit over their wine, the young man becomes almost exalted by the glow of the amethyst and ruby liquids he has swallowed; his speech begins to burn with it, and he alone is talking, the two elders merely assenting or exclaiming. He ranges far, his theme is the sublime Destiny of Man, and Man's too frequently miserable terrestrial lot. He instances the centre and south of Europe through which he has passed, the little inept Governments, mere provincial dukedoms, circumscribed and petty, the squalor of the peasant, the venial obscurantism of the clergy, the utter lack of representative institutions. His emotions, in crescendo, reach the intensity at which he cannot express them, his speech halts and dwindles. His Lordship takes the opportunity to signify that he may retire. Like some far-winged bird brought down in mid-flight, he seems lame and mute in his leave-taking, but is indulged. His Lordship stands before the fire, and Mr. Burgess stands a few feet away.

Mr. Burgess ventures to hope that His Lordship is satisfied. His Lordship is ruminating. Then, "I believe he will be most suitable!"

“?”

From afar, His Lordship comes back to Mr. Burgess.

“For Easthampton. I believe I have some interest!”

“To stand for Parliament. Such youth!”

“Most appropriate to these days. You know what is in the wind. The Bill!”

“I have heard. I hardly thought you favored such views, however!”

The most human emotion of all that evening crosses His Lordship’s face.

“Old Stick-leg opposes it. I oppose him!”

Mr. Burgess has hardly time to adapt his features to the expression of approval of the whimsies of the great, before His Lordship has receded from him.

“I should have thought the county was more appropriate, and your interest stronger!”

His Lordship has some misgiving, it is evident:

“The name of Carston is no password on my estates. And you cannot have mistaken the rustic mind. I have known tenants ride in my father’s cavalcade and vote against him —— ”

“Ill-disposed — disaffected —— ”

“That — or merely too stupid to know the difference between Blue and Buff — or from inertia — inability to express what is intended — or for a bet — or for a bribe —— ”

Mr. Burgess makes a gesture of resignation.

“Or some of them might remember —— ”

What they might remember, His Lordship does not say, but recedes again into the fastnesses of his own counsel.

Mr. Burgess, scrupulously respecting, waits in silence. And not unprofitably. His close brows are knitted; it would seem he also has some thinking to do. Quicker at drawing his conclusions, he essays:

“Is it your intention that he should reside here during the contest?”

His Lordship gives Mr. Burgess a sharp look, as if to discover what might be meant by that. But on Mr. Burgess’ countenance is nothing but the most earnest consideration for His Lordship’s plans. His Lordship decides: “Let him stay with you!”

Mr. Burgess is all compliance — and, it might be thought, satisfaction. In any case he allows a long interval of silence to pass before asking whether he may retire. His Lordship grants the request, exerts himself to summon the necessary escort. Not altogether a formality, for how should Mr. Burgess, though no stranger at the Place, find his way in all that marble labyrinth to the chamber dedicated to his repose. He is preceded by a servant bearing his candle, followed by another. Eventually the door is reached, and it is ascertained that Mr. Burgess has all he may require for the night. It would seem so. The bed is high and wide, but only occupies a small portion of the room. The curtains are drawn, a fire blazes, and before it Mr. Burgess’ nightshirt and cap hang folded on the arm of a chair. Left alone,

Mr. Burgess slowly undresses, putting off not only his holy calling but also his adaptability to the secular mind — ceases to be a priest, ceases to be a parson, a chaplain, a tutor, a scholar, a mentor, the holder of a comfortable and assured place in one of the most permanent hierarchies that have ever existed, becomes, in fact, a white-skinned, plump little old man, with the habit of a travelled house cat, and the outlook of a piece of well-treated furniture. Then even less, as his day shirt and socks come off, and his night-shirt, nightcap, dressing gown, and slippers go on, nothing more than the original human animal, less much of its original brutal dignity and fierceness, and plus a small and busy habit of sheltering in places warmed and defended by others. He lets his shins bask in the glow of the fire he regards so intently. Then an idea strikes him, he goes to his despatch case, that stands by the dressing table, takes out a letter and a newspaper two days old, and regards the latter at some length. There is a good deal in it about something called Reform, embodied in a Bill laid before the Houses of Parliament. To Mr. Burgess it is just that, nothing more nor less. Of all the intense passions, the immense urge onwards, the adamant holding back, the terrific heat engendered by that eternal shock between the irresistible force and the immovable mass, that make up human history, Mr. Burgess has no conception and desires none. He knows well enough what the words mean, is even passably acquainted, as befits a shrewd and educated

member of his cloth, with the arguments that have been proffered for and against the debated measure. But from his point of view, it is all shadows on the wall. He cannot conceive of such matters as affecting him personally. Reform — yes, there has been Reform. It has been done and settled, all that. The Church that contains him is, in a sense, a Reformed Church, and Mr. Burgess has no desire to undo the Reformation. Mr. Burgess' King is a reformed one, King by appointment, so to say, and incidentally head of Mr. Burgess' church, and Mr. Burgess sees no further need for Reform than for drawing on a second nightcap over the one he already wears. This Bill that he reads about in the news-sheet is a different thing, an attempt, as it were, to grow turnips in frames intended for cucumbers, a feat that might be dangerous, if it were not, fortunately, futile. Unused to comedy, not feeling the need for it, Mr. Burgess is almost amused by His Lordship in the character of the Reformer. But not quite. To Mr. Burgess, His Lordship is His Lordship, duly licensed by Church and King to have such foibles. Having learned as much about the matter as may be necessary to forward the project of his patron, Mr. Burgess puts the matter aside, and turns to the letter, to him vastly more important.

His sister-in-law, Sophie, left a widow, with a daughter, and no provision, and no possibility of making one, had been installed in his guest room at the Rectory, as a matter of course. His Chris-

tian profession had no need to urge him, where a kind heart and family duty led. But it had been a jolt to the well-oiled wheels, on which his life had run so regularly these many years, and happening, as it had, on the eve of his departure with young Mr. Carston, at His Lordship's suave but categorical injunction, it had remained, weighing slightly upon his mind. Here was Sophie's letter, confirming that she and the child were housed and cared for, and still he did not quite picture it. It was many years since he and Sophie had inhabited the same house, but never, in all his bachelor days, had he had a young girl added to his small responsibilities, and a cautious instinct had prompted him to reflect on the natural station of young girls. The species was, to him, confined to the young of the female sex who were either villagers to be shepherded, maids to be given orders, or young ladies to be bowed to, for whom due provision had been made by parents and guardians. Sophie's daughter, his niece, as he realised with a faint tremor, was none of these things, but a young girl, living in his house, with only one possible avenue of departure, suitable marriage. The daughter of a clergyman, the niece of another, she could not marry into a farm, nor into the squirearchy; she had neither the ability for the one, nor the social position for the other. She had no money. His cursory glimpses of her childhood had not impressed him especially with her looks. In a town there might have been vague possibilities among those professions that the law had

made gentle, but towns, to Mr. Burgess, were places in which very occasionally one stayed for the night. In the village he could imagine no place and no future for her. Then, during the tour, his experience of young Mr. Carston had given him an inspiration. The protégé of His Lordship was one of the few people to whom money and precise social station were negligible. He was above them all, above, even outside, the limitations attaching to aristocracy. He could do what he liked; in such a matter, his patron would ask for nothing but pleasant manners and subservience, and that Sophie might be trusted to see to. Mr. Burgess had been slightly alarmed at His Lordship's sudden proposition of the Parliamentary candidature, but the residence of the young gentleman at the Rectory more than counterbalanced this. For one thing, Mr. Burgess did not for one moment suppose that young Mr. Carson, even if he entered, would remain in Parliament. And he felt fairly secure that the respectful but insistent inclination the young gentleman had shown towards the fair sex, during the tour (which it had never been necessary to chide), would, when it was founded upon a strong and suitable attachment, oust what had been described as the Enthusiasms of Youth. Arrived at this conclusion, Mr. Burgess heard a clock somewhere chiming twelve, and noticed that the fire was sinking. So he put away the letter, said his prayers, extinguished his candle, and rolled himself in the bed-clothes.

*

*

*

If Mr. Burgess, buried in slumber, ceased to think of His Lordship, the compliment was returned. Left alone, His Lordship stood long looking at nothing. From time to time his confidential body servant passed across behind the screen, mutely observing him. At last, he turned and moved toward the door. At his step, the lesser menials roused themselves from the sleepy state into which they had fallen, and busied themselves, shutting up and putting out, behind him. For him alone the fire glowed, the candles blazed. As he mounted to his room the necessity for all that light and warmth ceased and it was obliterated. In his own apartment, he dallied a long while between the great bed that was hardly less than royal and the fire that burned there also. He dallied so long and so patently did nothing that Ogle, his man, changed the fine shirt he had aired for another, looked hesitant, looked repentant, looked as nearly nonexistent as could be, in the attempt to divine what it might be his master lacked. To no purpose. At last:

“Where have they put Mr. Carston?”

Ogle was relieved. Just that? Ogle knew. Young Mr. Carston was in the south wing, in the Prince’s chamber. Ogle had gone himself to see all was in order, and had found silence and darkness. All right. Ogle is dismissed, and soon sleep is master of the darkened house.

When His Lordship is next conscious of anything, it is of Ogle moving softly about, in the half of day-

light as yet permitted by the curtains. The fire has been lighted, the dressing room appears ready through its distant open door. His Lordship, whose dignity has foundations in a strong sense of duty, puts himself in Ogle's hands, breakfasts, sees his steward, receives letters, messages, news. Among other matters, Ogle brings word that the Reverend Mr. Burgess asks to be allowed to go to the Rectory. A conveyance is ordered out to take Mr. Burgess to Hoake, where he belongs, when His Lordship can spare him, and where now, for some short space, His Lordship will forget the existence of such a person. Perforce, for if His Lordship had to keep in mind all the people with whom he has commerce, and all the matters that come within his purview, he would need to be a much busier, more hurried, less lordly Lordship than he is, and that is unthinkable. Time is found, however, to send a bland inquiry for Mr. Carston, and an order nicely veiled with compliments, to be ready to ride at eleven. And at eleven, neither more nor less, His Lordship descends the broad steps of the south façade, changing his cane from one hand to the other to button tan gloves, his trousers well strapped down, his hat slightly cocked in the fashion he has set, and some faint release in his expression, which may be because, besides reading the classics, he affects the classic cult of outdoor exercise, or may also be because young Mr. Carston will be waiting. Who knows? Not the first groom, nor the second, who have, these twenty minutes, been

supervising the boys who are walking half a dozen riding horses up and down the fine short turf, while beyond, half a score more are riding the racers from the stable as distinct from the mere domestic animals.

Something, carefully screened from His Lordship, tinges the atmosphere of this more than military parade. For when His Lordship casts a semicircular glance around, which is plainly to discover where young Mr. Carston may be, the men dare only turn and look with hopeful beginnings of a grin across the cropped grey-green to where two figures are approaching. These show themselves to be young Mr. Carston and one of the boys, and it is related to His Lordship that, no sooner did the young gent come upon the scene, than he jumped on to the new hunter that had given so much trouble, and had been trying to break his neck and that of the boy who had been obliged to follow him, ever since. His Lordship's smile allows the grin to expand. There will be no unspoken reprimand, the fancy will be indulged, and young Mr. Carston will take a high place. The men had taken to him instantly, now they dare show it. How handsome the young gentleman looks, reining in, drawing up, preparing to dismount, but waved back by His Lordship, who with a gesture, picks out the long-bodied bay that makes his easy ride, mounts cleanly, and dismisses the whole turnout to exercise and stable routine. He will ride with young Mr. Carston alone. They swing along at an easy canter, reach the wood skirting the park, drop into a drive,

and have a gate opened for them by bobbing humility in gown and bonnet, and walk their horses along a country lane.

So far the pleasure on the young man's face has been mute and almost dutiful. Mr. Burgess was right about his manners. He has inflicted no banality on His Lordship's ears, paying perfect respect to the great man who goes with him, and to the beautiful animal that bears him. Mr. Burgess was right about his mind, for beyond manners, there lights his eye and cheek a rich pleasure in that subtlest of all loveliness, the dumb subdued beauty of English country and fair winter's day. Now that they are at walking pace in this humble highway, letting the horses' heads droop a little as they mount a slight rise, His Lordship changes the pitch of the almost formal gravity of their companionship by a light commonplace remark as to the mildness of the season, the open weather. It is enough. The young man flings out long sentences of pure adoration of the English countryside. His Lordship listens with complaisance, does not interrupt nor frown, hears how, from softer clime and more romantic scenes, his companion returns with such delight to the sombre colours, clean air, and rich cultivation of this English county, to all the gentle contour and wooded distance of low plateau and shallow valley. He is polished with it, too, quotes both classic and English authors on the subject. At the top of the rise they come out upon a stretch of heathery down, and His Lordship leads

along a practicable turfed ride, thus putting an end to verbal enthusiasm. The young man follows, dutiful. Now they skirt a red scar of gravel, mount a stony place, and come out upon short grass where the wind whistles to them how high they are. Ahead of them, as they race together, some sharp-outlined object, that is no part of the landscape, cuts the mild pigeon-grey of the sky, and presently reveals itself as the top of a stone spire. The young man spurs up beside His Lordship, all interest, and they draw rein on the high ridge.

There it lies below them, the city about its spire, its red-tiled roofs banked along certain defined streets, confined within the lines where its walls used to run, and then straggling more vaguely off along one or two main roads, into the fields. No wind down there, for the smoke rises straight from all its chimneys, save where, broad and steely, its river serpentines a lane of clearer air, and the masts of shipping stand like a leafless hedge. Six and thirty grey stone towers climb above the smoke, and about their feet, and ever and again between the ridged roofs the green of grass invades the sharper line and brighter colour of the buildings. Borne up to them upon the wind is a dull rumble of wheels and looms and footsteps, diversified by shrill cries, hammer taps and the reverberation of bells. Such a packed hive it looks and sounds, so much activity at that distance, where detail is lost, giving simply the impression of teeming life. The young man is moved, compares it to

Montegabriele, or to Auersberg, the former for shape, the latter for colour, begs His Lordship to note how our English cathedrals are long and low, and dominated by a single tower and spire of great height, while the Continental ones are high-shouldered and short-bodied, with many stumpy towers. More like ships, ours, and less like cliffs he surmises, in his wayward way. His Lordship, being preoccupied, does not challenge this naïve simile.

They strike diagonally downwards, the horses picking their way, but shortly find a gap in a bank that lets them into a sandy road. So they descend, all the wide panorama lost in an instant, and all the detail of that far remote picture coming up to meet them. Heavy wagons, bound for afar, creak behind three straining horses, workmen go afoot, gentlemen and rogues are riding singly or together. A beggar woman rests against the hedge for a moment, her baby carried in a shawl, and just about the first houses a gig is drawn up, an old white pony hangs its head, as the occupant leans over to talk earnestly with a man in shirt sleeves, the keeper of a small inn, of closed and forbidding appearance.

As the riders come abreast, the driver of the gig turns in his seat, and perceiving them, pulls off a very high, shabby old hat, and bows from the waist. Young Mr. Carston takes his cue from His Lordship. The latter replies to the salutation by an absent-minded nod, but does not cease to tap his horse, keeping it at a smart walk. Young Mr. Carston does

the same. They have now descended to a tree-fringed towpath skirting the river, which here is the boundary of the city; the houses and churches appear beyond it through orchard and garden, between wharf and warehouse. There is traffic in the river, business on the farther shore. Young Mr. Carston, profoundly interested, remarks how prosperous it all seems. For the first time His Lordship turns in the saddle and faces him, speaking with intention.

"There are grave matters hanging in the balance. Have you heard about the Bill?"

"Mr. Burgess has mentioned it to me."

"How would you like to stand for Parliament for the city?"

Young Mr. Carston's well-coloured face becomes a shade pinker. Novelty, the glorious vision from the ridge they have just left, pride, and a certain urge in the blood toward activity and yet more activity, tie his tongue. Half-heartedly he voices a doubt which is little more than good manners:

"I feel that I can but be unknown!"

"You will find that there is a certain interest in your favour. The member who supported the Bill has been obliged to go abroad. I should like it!"

Without more, His Lordship touches his horse. They leave the towpath for a road that leads them, trotting, uphill; they let the horses walk down to a village, and cross the river by a ferry. His Lordship is silent, immovable of lip and eye. Young Mr. Carston is boiling with excitement, sees himself argu-

ing, haranguing, bringing all his callow rhetoric to bear upon assemblies that appear to his imagination in the dress and attitude of Roman senators. Then a thought strikes him, and he must intrude upon His Lordship as the ferryboat sluggishly bends a broad ripple closer and closer to the opposite bank.

“Who was the person in the gig?”

His Lordship with some difficulty remembers:

“I believe that is the lawyer from Easthampton — a Mister ——” but His Lordship does not remember. And no other word is uttered as they trot the length of country road, find a gate that gives upon headlands of bare arable, that leads to a grass ride through the woods, that end at the Lodge gate.

Before the Place there is a subdued, well-concealed scurry of boys to take the horses; within doors an even more successful secret marshalling of men, as they pass rapidly to the luncheon table, flanked by a groaning buffet. Ogle is here, letters, messages, His Lordship deals right and left with the words and papers as a deft swimmer with a choppy sea. Young Mr. Carston eats what is set before him, at a nod from the centre of all this commotion, but is left out, feels cold between the legs, an ebbing of the pulses the ride and the announcement had stimulated. At length His Lordship, who has been helping himself to food and drink with one hand, has leisure for the meal, and finally for the young dependent at his side. And then, when that moment comes, seems almost making amends. There is a slight smile on

his face, a marked warming of his manner. He swallows a mouthful of sherry and pushes away his plate.

"These matters move faster than I supposed. Your opportunity will come very shortly!"

"Indeed!"

"Yes. For certain reasons it is better you should not remain here. You will return to Mr. Burgess at the Rectory. You will not mind!"

Young Mr. Carston murmurs a soft "No"; mind, he is not in the mood for minding. He would almost find the Rectory, well-known and familiar, a convenient place to collect his numerous thoughts, indulge the many and bright-coloured dreams that the morning has provided him with.

His Lordship is called away, so the youth wanders alone in the great house, feeling, perhaps, most at home in the library, reinforced by its thousand volumes, its stacked portfolios, its busts of the ancient and the wise. Here Ogle finds him, and imparts in Ogle's special manner that the carriage is coming at three for him. And so at the appointed time he goes. As he is about to descend the steps His Lordship appears, and comes for the moment quite out of himself, takes him familiarly by the elbow and conducts him to the carriage, saying to him:

"I shall see you from time to time, Theodore!"

Theodore!

Young Mr. Carston leaves the Place.

II

The Rectory

THE Rectory of Hoake was by no means the low-browed rat-riddled cottage in which earlier priests of the parish had existed. Rebuilt under the last of the Georges, it stood separated from the road by a small formal garden, while behind it, a larger one for fruit and vegetables climbed the hill that sheltered it from the northeast. Beside it was a sufficient paddock, for this was all glebe land, and the whole plainly a comfortable property, rather than a mere incumbent's residence. Such indeed might be expected of a Rectory that was in His Lordship's gift, and no more suitable occupant than Mr. Burgess could have been found. The fact that he was a bachelor was an advantage. It meant that the kitchen and offices, at the back, which joined on by a small stable and coach house, to the paddock fence, were the domain of the Rector's man Jordan and Mrs. Jordan, the Rector's housekeeper, a childless couple, devoted to the interests of their master. No squalling children trampled the garden beds, or scratched the paint of window sills, or thumbed the immaculate polish of the balusters. A small wicket in the wall next the road, from which a path ran to the stables, separated callers of the lower orders from visitors who approached the front door, by the white gate and gravelled drive to

the porch; and over the whole brooded a not unkindly, but authoritative mundane translation of that Peace so frequently mentioned in Holy Writ, confirming that he who was Rector was also a gentleman; a servant of God, perhaps, but a person of a certain station in this earthly life.

When Mrs. Sophie Burgess, relict of the Rector's deceased brother, had first found herself within such walls, she heaved a sigh of relief. Residence abroad in semi-tropical countries had sapped a vitality never excessive. Widowhood had been a disaster with which she had felt unable to cope, and penury frightened her. But the decline from being one of a privileged white colony, set among subservient natives, to being an inconsiderable member of the smaller gentry, had come too late for her to be able to assert her old authority over these white servants who seemed to her unduly competent and hence independent. She soon discovered that, in their master's absence, the Jordans regarded her as a visitor for whom it was necessary to fend, but to whom they owed no special allegiance, and the only apprehension that had weighed in a mind distressed by feeble health and adversity had been due to the sensation of temporary sojourn which this attitude perpetuated.

When therefore, going to the window at the sound of wheels, she saw the Rector deposited upon his doorstep, with valise and trunk, she sighed again and even more contentedly. She had been prepared by message for his arrival, but here he was, and as Mrs.

Jordan bustled him in, she received him with heart-felt pleasure. His greeting was cordial to her, and approving to his niece.

That niece could say from her heart how glad she was to see her uncle, without discovering that her pleasure was caused by the arrival of a fresh person, and enhanced by that person's opposite sex, even where an elderly bachelor uncle of no gallant habit was concerned. The emotion was sufficient to brighten her eyes and tint her cheeks. She gained greatly by this. She had that pallor that belongs to people born in hot countries, something exotic seemed to have prevented her eyebrows curving lower at the ends and to have pointed the outer corner of each eye. Though her hair was brushed smoothly down to the conventional ringlet, and her expression was subdued in accordance with the public opinion of the times regarding the expression of young girls, she was sufficiently foreign-looking to appear sulky when not animated. Her uncle saw her, therefore, under the most favourable circumstances and felt that slight warming and unbending behind his waistcoat that even the least susceptible of uncles may feel when confronted by an unrealised niece. But the natural reaction to such first impressions is shyness, and this kept her demure and aloof during lunch and afterwards, until at her mother's request she took her needlework to her room, in order that the elders might talk of affairs. No amount of avuncular kindness or parental indulgence could go so far

as to carry on such conversation before a young girl, and she went without a word, but with compressed lips and drooping head, and that slightly un-English carriage she had acquired during a childhood covered by few clothes and exercised on mule back.

The Rector's inquiries as to his sister-in-law's affairs were slightly curtailed by his sense of more delicate matters in reserve. Satisfied that her meagre savings sufficed for her clothes and those of the child (as he called her), he rather hurried on to the fact that young Mr. Carston was shortly to become resident at the Rectory, and stopped. The matter was more delicate than he had imagined, and he found it impossible to be as plain as he would have desired. He could outline the obvious advantage of His Lordship's patronage, the impossibility of opposing his wishes, the charming character of the young gentleman, and look meaningly at his relative. But farther he could not go, and it was not far enough. Mrs. Sophie became mystified and nervous. What exactly was the young man in whom His Lordship showed such interest, who was to stand for Parliament in such a hurry, and to live under the same roof with her! Neither clever nor confident, she failed to grasp whether he were to be treated as quasi-noble or dependently young, and remained flustered and anxious.

"Marina has been occupying the Mauve Room at the back. Mrs. Jordan mentioned that it had been a gentleman's study. Will he wish to resume it, do you suppose?"

Mr. Burgess, still under the spell of a new niece, did not think so.

"He is no longer a pupil of mine. I may be tutor but no longer *in loco parentis*. He will be much occupied, out of the house!"

"Will he be present at table?"

"Occasionally, as his engagements permit. He will need some repose from the stresses of the election!"

"I fear that I incommode you, with Marina!"

"Pray be at ease, Sophie. You do not incommode me in the least. On the contrary, you and she should provide a pleasant distraction from the various public functions and other assemblies that he will be obliged to attend!"

Dare he be more blunt? His sister-in-law seemed impenetrable. But she was merely nervous. When the Rector went off to speak to the Jordans, she sat with her hands in her lap, looking before her, as the short day waned. She did not seek her daughter, in whom she found a fairly dutiful child, but hardly a companion. She was roused by the arrival of a carriage, brisk greetings in a voice unknown, and loud expostulations from the Jordans that the Rector had gone out. Before she could make up her mind who this might be, a pleasant-faced young gentleman of admirable presence was ushered in, and announced as:

"Young Mr. Carston, ma'am!"

Mrs. Sophie responded immediately to the atmosphere he brought with him. Could this be the perplexingly unplaceable protégé of His Lordship?

She recovered in a moment her best Residency manner, that in which she had been used to receive stray ensigns or planters who came by the rare ships calling at the distant settlement in which so much of her life had been spent. Motioning him to a seat she resumed hers, and made polite inquiries about the tour which he had made, the one subject on which she felt some confidence, being herself far more travelled than any young man who had passed a twelvemonth in the better known parts of Europe. The encounter was mutually agreeable, and was only interrupted by the sound of some heavy body being moved about the hall, and the half-smothered objurgations of Jordan, who, with the privilege of an old servant, was giving himself his opinion of the weight and size of young Mr. Carston's travelling trunk. The young man sprang to his feet, pleaded the exigencies of so recent a return, and left the room to tell Jordan that the trunk could be part unpacked where it stood, so that it might be easier to move.

Jordan's ill humour was not caused so much by the weight of the trunk as by the Rector's instructions that the young gentleman would occupy the little bedroom that looked across the kitchen roof. This Jordan felt to be a slight to one whom he had previously adopted as his young master, and almost as much his pupil out of doors as the Rector's indoors, and Jordan's particular manner of showing disapproval was to grumble in half-voice. Thus young Mr. Carston, having willingly but laboriously filled

both arms with books, maps, some articles of clothing and curios, staggered upstairs and turned to the right toward the Mauve Room which had been his study bedroom during his years of tutelage. Contriving to tip the latch, he pushed the door open with his foot and made towards the big bed, on which to drop his burden, in order to sort out its contents. But astonishment turned him to stone. The simple if comfortable old room that had housed his leather and cloth-smelling belongings, boots, books, fishing rods, and hats, was transformed. It was daintied, tidied, scented not merely with femininity, but with femininity that had procured strange, little known essences and materials, while across the familiar bed foot and chair lay garments of a gauzy white, or of strange garish colour such as he had never seen or dreamed of. And there, upon the old low window seat on which he had conned Homer and Ovid, and from which he had taken imaginary shots at starlings, or called down to Jordan for the prospects of a morning's sport, lay a woman who, in his eyes, instantly became as much more than those boyish pre-occupations, as the goddesses of the Roman Pantheon were than the inhabitants of the actual Rome he had visited. That she was dressed in the high-waisted, neckless and short-sleeved frock of the period lessened not one whit her divinity. Only thus garbed had he ever seen Venus, Athena, or Calypso, in the woodcuts and engravings that illustrated his classical texts. And only thus, one hand upon the breast, and one

hanging floorward, one knee drawn up, and one slipper appearing beyond the hem of the skirt, the face half-turned, lips parted in expectancy, had he ever seen portrayed the astonished virgins of casuistic deities with whom he was far more familiar than the maids and matrons of King William the Fourth's England.

The plain fact was that Marina, sulking slightly at her dismissal from the presence of her elders, had soon become tired of doing nothing and had revengefully set about refurbishing her slender wardrobe. Wearing for warmth all the English clothes she possessed, she was looking over the remains of those she had worn beyond the seas. Growing weary of stitching, she had let her numbed right hand repose upon her breast, and her left droop to correct the impeded circulation. Then, as the door opened, she had instinctively drawn up one foot, and turned her head, innocently posing for the tableau, as far as any girl of her looks could be unconscious of what is becoming in attitude and demeanour.

How long these two might not have gazed into each other's eyes, the hazel of Marina's pupil, that so exactly touched the lower eyelid, drawing in Theodore's intelligent, deep-set velvet brown one, neither of them could have told, for the merest accident ended that embrace of glances — the slipping of the pile of books in the youth's arms.

His expression faded in a moment from something warmer than awe to an almost comic dismay,

as he tried to balance his encumbrance. Marina leapt from the window seat, with arms outstretched to help him. The ill-adjusted load dissolved in a crescendo of thuds upon the floor, and with a stifled exclamation, a faint shriek, they fell into each other's arms and stood swaying an instant, each depending on the other to keep erect.

At the contact, good spirits and their lingering childish sense of fun prompted them to laugh, he heartily, she in high, ringing, falling cadence. But only for an instant. They drew apart, he stiffly, as if fearing to lose the pressure of her fingers on his lapels, she crossing her hands upon her neck to hide the rosy marks his light grip had made. Blushes replaced laughter, and Marina, the quicker of the two, stooped with swift grace to gather his fallen belongings and conceal her face. He knelt immediately and found his tongue.

"I beg a thousand pardons for a most unwarrantable intrusion!"

"It is for me to ask forgiveness. I fear I am an interloper here, but not by choice!"

"I cannot claim any right to enter the room in such a way. It was by habit!" His voice had risen, hers deepened as the significance of tingling finger tips set their hearts fluttering.

"I trust your volumes have suffered no hurt!"

"Oh, no, I thank you!" She was grateful to him for accepting the commonplace, to which she felt a

momentary panic impelling her, he to her for her presence, her coolness, herself.

Then confusion again. She found herself holding out to him a well-folded pair of buckskin breeches; he had turned to lay aside a hastily retrieved armful of oddments, but dared not put them on the frail white garments that covered the chair. Deeply conscious now, the moment they took to reach the window seat and dispose of what they carried seemed an echoing age. What next?

They faced each other, their gazes entwined. Then, like the stroke of Doom, the prompter that calls all human kind to play its part upon the stage that has been set for it, came three knocks upon the door. In the silence rose the flat humble voice of the little maid summoned from the village on the occasion of "company" to the Rectory, announcing the early dinner that was the custom of the house. What could he do, but bow, pick up his possessions and retire. Even so, his sense of the situation was such that he went on tiptoe, with obvious reluctance. She threw after him a look that might have entangled him as effectually as her arms, and drawn him back. But the door closed softly. He was gone.

Left alone, she came quickly to life. Stoical and deft she put away her things, smoothed and tied herself. In doing so, her foot encountered, where it had fallen beneath the vallance of the bed, one of his books. With tender stealth she picked it up, slipped it beneath her pillow, and went downstairs.

The first appearance in the candle-lighted dining room was dreaded possibly by both, but by Theodore Carston most, for on leaving the Mauve Room he had encountered the little maid who had just been knocking at his door in turn, and regarded his approach from behind her with open-mouthed wonder, as though it had been an act of witchcraft. Brushing past her he was relieved to see that Jordan had not yet brought up his trunk, hastily made his toilet and descended.

But both gathered courage when it became evident that the escapade was unobserved. The Rector, after welcoming his young friend, solemnly presented Marina. Here was an opportunity for heartening byplay. With what grave simplicity did she curtsy and he bow, and fall decorously behind the elders in the comforting ordinariness of the conversation. The Rector was pleased that his young friend had arrived betimes and had already made the acquaintance of Mrs. Sophie Burgess. A small parish matter had been referred to his authority, and he must now readjust the arrangement under which the curate had been answering for him during his absence. Further, a message had arrived begging Mr. Carston's attendance at a meeting of the Committee of the Buff Interest, on the morrow, which gave Mr. Burgess the opening to point a few solemn observations on the pleasing but onerous position which his guest and erstwhile pupil would be called upon to fill. All this was easy going for two young people who might

otherwise have been extremely uncertain of themselves.

The dinner, simple but substantial, did the rest, and the slumber-inviting evening of heavy platitudes and hands at picquet or at cribbage, with Mrs. Sophie's thankfully dragged-in references to her life abroad, reinforced the delightful conspiracy. Not a glance, not a murmur did they permit themselves, each admiring and cherishing the other in the delicious make-believe. So much so that the inevitable good night seemed an outrage. Part again? But decorum weighed upon them, and they did, briefly, correctly, finally.

Theodore Carston had to listen to Mr. Burgess' preparation of him, as it were, for the morrow. He heard but little, retaining the name of the lawyer from Easthampton, Mr. Statchard, who would introduce him. He was glad enough when the Rector ceased speaking and rose, and with a Latin aphorism, led him to the table in the hall, in which the candlesticks stood reflected. Above, having placed his light upon the bedside table, Theodore opened his casement and breathed the still night air. What was that patch of illumination that touched one corner of the kitchen chimney and the bare apple boughs beyond? Leaning out, he ascertained that it came from the carelessly curtained window of the Mauve Room. Was she then awake and reading? Or weeping, romantic egotism hoped. He sat by the window, staring at that effulgence until his head fell

against the window frame and he woke, chilled and disillusioned. The glimmer had gone; perhaps he had dreamed it. Healthy youth prevailed, he undressed, got into bed, and slept.

The atmosphere next morning was alarmingly altered. Uncertainty ruled in the grey light, instead of candle-lit confidence. Feeling a need for collecting his thoughts, he slipped down and out by well-known ways, and mounted the forlorn garden to the arbour at the top, looking over tree-bordered fields. Turning the corner of the rickety green-painted woodwork, he was confronted with the startled gravity of clear maiden eyes raised from a book. The lips moved, but "good morning" was inaudible. He seated himself beside her on the cold bench, marvelling at the golden brown of her skin against the white fur of her pelisse. The question was so important he must ask:

"What are you reading?"

For one defiant moment the book was drawn to her breast. Then a dimple came at the corner of her lip, and to mitigate the surrender, she said:

"Let me restore it. I found it in my room!"

It was his Vergil.

"Do you read the Latin authors?"

She shook her head mournfully:

"I know some Dutch sentences, a Spanish proverb, two native tongues, but of Latin or Greek, none. Is it very old?"

"It is immortal!"

A little gasp: "Heroic!"

"More. Deathless. Let me render it, as best I can. . . ."

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He knew it by heart, and, his eyes deep within hers, he poured it out. Whether he informed it with an ardour of his own, or whether its imperishable qualities conveyed his intention, he was lost in his task. Feminine perceptions, if less robust, are more sensitive. She gripped his wrist with a firmness surprising from her soft hand, and following her averted eyes, he found himself regarded by the open-mouthed Warman, the little maid.

"Well?" he asked sharply.

With plucky but laborious effort, the girl muttered:

"Breakfas' is on!" in broad East Anglian, and loped off at her countrywoman's half-run.

He looked mournful, but Marina was braver:

"We had better go in!"

No explanation of their late and simultaneous entry into the morning room seemed to be required. The Rector and Mrs. Sophie were complaisant. The two young people had not heard the mother's astonished inquiry for her daughter, the Rector's diplomatic reply. The urn steamed, the hot dishes were appetising, the coffee stimulating. Every facility was given for Marina to fall naturally into her rôle of niece. Theodore into that of an approved ex-

pupil. If the young people were silent, it was but good manners. If they had an air of waiting for the breakfast to end, it was not noticed. The elders did not hasten, and by the time they rose, Mr. Statchard was announced.

He waited upon young Mr. Carston in the drawing-room, to which the Rector led the way. Marina kept her eyes on her plate, and with a suppressed sigh, the young man relinquished the sight of her for that of an elderly lawyer, whose low bow and deferential deportment had no compensating charm.

Mr. Statchard seemed more than a single lawyer. On his bent shoulders he seemed to carry his profession as a mantle. His cheeks had the texture of vellum, his eyes and hair the flatness of colour that belongs to ink dried at a fire. The shabbiness that Theodore had noted, even as he glanced cursorily at the same man in the gig on the previous day, now revealed itself to be no mere adjunct of poverty, nor the carelessness that may well become the habit of an aging bachelor. It was a professional shabbiness as if to suggest that weightier matters than personal appearance concerned one who was a gentleman by law and not by pretension. The hands clasped before, the head bent slightly to one side as though to catch each syllable of the client's instructions, the lips pursed as though supposing some perpetual contingency which the lay mind was unlikely to have foreseen, or emphasising the finality of some decision that was difficult of appreciation, all bespoke the habit of

mind that partook of the wizard's on the one hand, and the priest's on the other. His black clothes were rusty, his cravat shadowed in the folds by snuff, the chin, that was ostensibly clean-shaven, showed a day's growth of tiny grey bristles; when he spoke no teeth appeared in the deliberately unfolded mouth, which, when he was silent, had the appearance of being not only shut but locked.

After the Rector's introduction, he began at once; he was pleased to make the acquaintance of Mr. Theodore Carston. He understood that Mr. Carston was of age and of independent means.

It took Theodore some seconds to understand that this categorical description of himself required confirmation. He gave it, with that misgiving which inevitably assailed the unaccustomed when confronted with Mr. Statchard, as that gentleman intended it should. The Rector begged them both to be seated, and the lawyer continued:

"You will have been informed of the main points at issue, in the present contest?"

"I have been made cognisant of the general aspects of the situation!" replied Theodore, immediately aware of a look which he could not help translating to himself as meaning, "Oh no, you haven't!" But what Mr. Statchard said was:

"You are quite unused to such a public position as you will now be required to occupy?"

The Rector interposed to say that he himself had been charged with Mr. Carston's education, and that

they had but recently returned from an extended tour upon the Continent. He feared that this rendered Mr. Carston's acceptance by the Committee hardly probable.

The lawyer raised one hand, but whether to deprecate interpolation on the part of the Rector, or whether to signify "On the contrary, the less he knows the better!" Theodore was unable to determine. He felt a pang of uncertainty. The lawyer turned toward him again:

"And will you be prepared to present yourself to the Committee of the Buff party?"

"I am prepared!"

"Then the sooner we go the better. There is no time to lose!"

Theodore rose because the other did, and said that he would wait upon Mr. Statchard immediately. Once out of the room, and free from the direct influence of the little old man, his steps lingered and his heart longed. What would he not have given to have presented himself to a committee consisting of Marina and the Muses? She was not to be seen, and he went for his hat and gloves in deep disappointment. What had he that he could offer instead of himself, to keep himself in her thoughts while bodily absent? Glancing over the huddled books upon his dressing table, he picked out an English version of the *Aeneid*, and left it on the coffer by the stairhead, conspicuously visible. Then, turning sadly, he descended the stairs to Mr. Statchard and Duty.

But halfway there he met Marina and Allurement coming up, and his heart rushed to his lips.

"May the moment be winged!" he murmured, throwing a look that was meant to elucidate. Whether it did or not he was quite unable to determine. Marina's glance was so mournful that he arrived in the hall but haltingly. Mr. Statchard was obviously impatient with him, ushered him through the porch and into the hired carriage with a firmness that was as marked as his own preoccupation. The Rector cried Godspeed, the hired man shook the reins, and the conveyance moved off, and Marina hearing it, closed the door of the Mauve Room and sank upon a chair.

The immediate cause of the chagrin she felt was an interchange between her uncle and Mr. Statchard which she had overheard as she passed the open door of the drawing-room, on her way to her room to put on her bonnet for the morning walk that she took with her mother. The Rector had said:

"A son of Carston, sometime the steward to His Lordship!"

"Carston had no son!" the lawyer had replied.

The precise significance of the words escaped her, and duty and manners bade her hasten by. She retained, however, a sense of something sinister in these two voices discussing the young man. Nor was her own feeling about him by any means so clear. Had the Rector turned upon her, demanding, as he would have liked perhaps to have demanded of her mother,

“Has my niece fallen in love with Mr. Carston?” she would have been genuinely indignant. Her feeling was of vaguer substance, and less prosaic. Theodore was much more than a prepossessing young man who had suddenly taken a good deal of notice of her. He was the only man of her own age who had shown any trait of character that had intrigued her. Her childhood had been surrounded by dull young ensigns and elderly liverish officials of a small white colony, narrowly select amid a coloured population in bondage. Her stay in England had provided more people, but no wider a circle. He who had burst in upon her privacy, with his arms full of books, who had surprised her in the arbour with eyes full of adoration, was a new experience rather than a suitor. What he offered she did not conceive as matrimony so much as escape from oppressive limitation. Admiration she had had, from young and old, from her uncle and the curate, from soldiers and civilians, and had found it singularly flavourless. Her mind, whose solitude had been interrupted only by dark-skinned servants and thick-skinned relatives, was awakening, as was so much around her in the decade of her puberty. All that free human commerce and intellectual exercise from which she had been debarred had the ineffable charm of the unknown, a heaven of possibilities. She would have been as astonished to hear her condition described as boredom, as she would have been affronted to hear it described as love. And now he, the herald of all

that was Fresh, was gone, spirited away by these two old men. She bore a grudge. Her life had been circumscribed, but within its bounds she had been spoiled. Now she had been denied something definite that she wanted, and that she regarded as already hers. Hence her demeanour. Her shoulders and eyes drooped, her lips pouted, her hands reposed in her lap. But she was too young and too determined for mere submission. There worked in her blood something that had never been present in that of her parents, an infusion not from alien stock, but from another age. Casting back over the memories of that morning and the evening before, for any tangible link with that which she had lost, it occurred to her that the book she had given up to Mr. Carston had been laid aside by him, in the morning room. Noiseless and intent, she left her chamber, but halted at the head of the stairs. There, on the heavy old coffer that contained the curtains of other seasons, the hangings of other years, lay another and more appropriate volume, a translation into English. Without hesitation she picked it up, glanced at the flyleaf, and read "Theodore Carston" as though it were some beneficent charm. She returned to her room, disposed herself upon the window seat, threw a shawl about her, began manfully at the black-lettered title-page.

There is no doubt that in a little while she would have flown, upon the wings of the spirit, to that unimagined shore, where the destiny-ridden chieftain

landed amid all the stir of arming camps and beleaguered fortresses, where every act from its bareness of detail had the stark dignity that the imagination requires to fasten on, but before she had perused many lines, there came a knock on the door, and her mother entered, dressed for walking.

“Why, Marina, are you not ready? You intend to accompany me, do you not?”

Strongly prompted to a determined negative, Marina had a yet stronger instinct to conceal from her mother the book, its owner, and all they meant to her. Finding a hasty excuse in the fact that she had not noticed the hour, she put her occupation aside, sought bonnet, tippet, cloak and boots, and speedily prepared herself to accompany her parent. That lady picked up the book the daughter had put down, and was perplexed by it. Latin she was aware of, as part of learning. Poetry she knew to be a polite accomplishment connected with albums. But the long continuous screed she failed to recognise. It went with one of the queer moods of a child whom she had long given up trying to understand, if indeed she had ever attempted to do so.

For Mrs. Sophie Burgess and her daughter, there was only one walk. They went to church on Sunday from habit rather than conviction, to Easthampton on market day, not so much for shopping as from convention. But on the other days the morning's walk could hardly be elsewhere than to Mayley Castle, a picturesque ruin of the sort just coming into fashion,

situate in the neighbouring parish, at a convenient distance, within the grounds of Sir Curtius Hamilton, a baronet of recent creation, who had obligingly given the ladies his permission to visit it, at the appeal of the Rector of Hoake.

Marina had been there with her mother at least twice a week, for many months, and had long abandoned any hope of finding new interest in the half-comprehended huddle of fallen stones and strangling ivy that surrounded an open space of grass, where a few sheep grazed under the care of a tongue-tied village boy, who touched his cap whenever addressed.

On this occasion Marina was more silent than usual, and her mother was obliged to ask if she were indisposed. 'This was also in some faint hopes that a confession might result, concerning young Mr. Carston, for Mrs. Sophie had, upon reflection, grasped the intention of the Rector's manner. Marina, however, replied petulantly that she was well, and returned only monosyllables to the usual remarks upon the view of bare, well-kept woodlands and shallow, peaceful valley that were now dominated by the forlorn shell from which so much chivalry and valour, so much brutal violence and vacillating turbulence, had long departed. Only once did Marina take the initiative during that excursion, and that was to ask if That Man would be a frequent visitor at the Rectory. Genuinely mystified, her mother was obliged to ask, what man?

"The old one, who came this morning!"

"Why, I hardly know. His business is with young Mr. Carston rather than with your uncle, I believe!"

Marina said no more, but refused to make a détour by the adjacent farm, to ask for a glass of milk, which was one of the usual pleasures of the walk. Her mother acquiesced and they returned to the Rectory somewhat earlier than usual, an advantage in Marina's eyes, for she knew that in the afternoon she would be expected to keep her mother company in the drawing-room, to receive visits from the few village personages who were privileged to call at the Rectory for social purposes. She resumed her reading, with half an ear for the sound of wheels upon the gravel, more than hoping that Mr. Carston's business would permit of his returning to luncheon, but determined in any case to absorb as much of the book, his book, as might be possible.

But luncheon was partaken of with no more exhilarating company than that of her mother and uncle, and the afternoon passed without a visitor, and in her heart Marina's resentment of her life and station grew for very lack of expression. At last she was able to escape to her room once more. She buried herself in her studies, unmindful of the chill air, and failing light, warmed by inward fires. At last she heard the sound of wheels and voices. Then, with hardly dissimulated impatience she put a touch to her toilet, modestly hid her brilliant glance, subdued her beating heart, and descended the stairs.

III

The George

LONG before the first glimmer of that morning had lighted the narrow strip of sky that alone was visible from the recesses of the yard of the George Inn at Easthampton, the place was astir. A man, who would later be clean-shaven, but who at present was unshorn, half-dressed, in shirt, striped waistcoat, unbuttoned cord breeches and shoes, clambered down from the loft in which he had slept and busied himself with lighting a stable lantern that he kept in one of the hundred cabin-like outhouses that had been tucked into every angle, and beneath every stair of the rambling old place, during six centuries. Having coaxed it to a murky glow, he stationed himself at the door of a large room that looked like a barn that had strayed in from the country, a long while ago, lost itself, and become what it was now labelled, "Carriers' Room." Within this cavern could be heard movements as of sheep stirring in a pen, but when the lantern became dimly visible, a human voice hailed the bearer, sounding oddly as if speaking from the dark roof:

"All aboard, Ben; save your light!"

The holder of the lantern entered and raised it, and discovered a muffled figure, standing on a chair, one hand upon the clock face to ascertain the hour.

"You're at it again. I said I'd rouse y'. The Missis says you've near rubbed out the figure four!"

"Well, tell her from me that seein's believing, but feelin' is the naked truth!" The speaker leapt down, and with his fellows began shouldering out of the doorway. Ben scrutinised them, in spite of many assurances of "All paid, and dear at the price!" and having satisfied himself that they had in fact paid, was about to turn away, when in the shadows beyond the rough table he saw something that made him look farther with an exclamation.

The carrier that spoke first was beside him:

"It's worth a guinea to you not to look, Ben!"

Ben was slow to believe it. Stirring the sleeping figure with his foot, he seemed to ruminate.

"There's a reward offered!" he said.

"You'll not inform, Ben!"

At these words he of the reclining figure, no longer caring to feign sleep, sat up, showing a face on which dirt and neglect could not conceal a terror that was near to desperation.

"It's a brother o' mine, Ben!"

"He's drunk, and dunno where he is. Get him away!"

"God bless you, Ben!"

Unmoved, Ben watched the lumbering carts pulled out, the sturdy little horses backed in, by instinct rather than sight, and the long stream of men, vehicles and animals, the old primitive walking-pace traffic that descended direct from the first bul-

lock cart, file out of the yard. Ben did not reflect upon it. To him it was a bi-weekly routine. Had it been suggested to him that men should go by other power than horse power, at other pace than horse pace, with other standards than horse sense, he might have said again: "You're drunk and dunno where you are!" He was far from such imaginings and went on to his own horses, waking sleepy boys to assist him, then going to the top of the house, two galleries up, to wake equally unwilling girls, so that they should wake grudging travellers, who must away by coach. He saw that the fowls were fed, by letting them run beneath the mangers, that the cat and dog were not neglected; in fact, he worked for three hours, an obscure but effective Titan, stimulating the travail of Chaos, until about seven he heard an important cough, a high authoritative voice, a rustle of ample skirts in the Snuggery, and knew thereby that Mrs. Armes was down and about, and that when the Gods arrive, such a half-god as he may go to breakfast.

For such was the relation in which Mrs. Armes stood to Ben. Born, as far as he knew, in that yard, grown up there with horses and dogs, cats and fowls for his playmates and companions, almost his brothers and sisters, his education had consisted of learning from his predecessor the language of signs chalked on a door, and who must obey and be obeyed; with, for religious instruction, a firm belief that the bewigged head painted on the sign above the entry to the yard represented a permanent King George,

source of all good, and to be saluted with hurrahs whenever his name was mentioned. The long chain of causes that had brought his own father from the village to the town and caused him, Ben, to be so christened and thus subsequently employed, were as far beyond his desire for inquiry as was the faint image, now gradually reappearing as King George on the signboard weathered, showing an earlier portrayal of a George in armour, spearing a dragon. For him, the actual George yard that he saw from day to day was sufficient, sufficient the meals that were provided for him in the big kitchen, when every one else had been provided for, sufficient his wage of a guinea when Armes remembered it, his tips when he got them. For any provision for the illnesses he never felt, the desires he never experienced, for the old age and burial he never contemplated, he trusted the George, understanding by that the sign over the door which was involved in a sort of trinity with George Armes, his present master, and Mrs. Armes. The latter certainly gave him every reason for such belief. She was one of those fortunate women who, when the bloom of youth is fading, are able to replace it by other and yet more permanent attractions. The pretty Miss Bullen who had consented to be the wife of George Armes had suffered no eclipse. Sedentary occupation, the habit of taking gin as a specific for all life's ills, and equally for its sorrows, might have doubled the measurement of the slim waist, slackened the sprightly steps, and fixed in a perennial

magenta the rose-blush of the cheek. But her empire over men had achieved an equal stabilisation. If she no longer ruled them by her looks, she did so now far more surely by a cheerful dictatorialness that she dubbed "making the gentlemen comfortable." Once a person had been rated by her as a gentleman, he was in danger of having his meals ordered, his bed warmed, and even his toilet amended, and of being charged for it, whether he liked it or not.

She presided in the Snug behind the bar, of a darkness only comparable to the cockpit of a ship, but with one cardinal advantage. Its door gave upon the main passage at the foot of the stairs, a hatchway opened upon the kitchen, one wall was occupied by a window looking into the bar, while a bay, built out into the yard, gave a view, forward, to the entry from the Market Place, and back to the dark crannies of the stables and tap that ended in the double door on to Middens Alley, thus commanding the whole establishment. At this early hour of the day she could be heard moving with a rustle and creak that showed the well-informed that she was not to be argued with, as the softening and sweetening influence of the juniper specific was not yet to be felt. She had a word for every one, a sharp way of throwing up the hatch and crying, "Three breakfasts in the coffee room, that's eighteen, twenty-two and twenty-three. They're together. Eggs and bacon!" and slamming it again. Then selecting one of the score of bell

handles that, between the sporting prints, theatrical announcements and notices of sales, lined the well-coloured walls, she summoned Ben and gave him several orders that he committed to memory. Then she was after "Those girls", and at once any intelligent member of the male sex thanked his stars for being so, for Mrs. Armes had never seen the need for making ladies comfortable, much less women, least of all maids in service. In fact her opinion, frequently expressed, was that they were lucky and lazy. Yet when the more usual sort of accident overtook one of them, she had been known to let her lie up in a dis-used garret.

On this particular morning, ordinary matters demanded less charity, and the tone in which she called to a girl passing along the gallery, "Breakfast. Look sharp. Tell your master!" was not one that allowed discussion or dawdling. Before she could be obeyed, a young man in black, high-hatted, and with infinite assurance, passed through the bar, and presented himself at the Snug door.

"Well?" demanded the landlady sharply.

"Very well, thank you, Mrs. Armes!"

"What do you want?" The tone of her voice rose.

The young man placed his hand upon his heart, sighed, drawled, "Ah! that's more than I've time to tell you, but at the moment — just a smile!"

"Will you state your business, Mr. Vardigans!"

"My master's compliments ——" the young man

gave a little pause to allow the effect which he expected to be produced — “and can he have the small Assembly to-day !”

“Why, certainly he can. You should have said that at first !”

“Oh, Mrs. Armes !” And, as though in mock castigation, the young man raised his hat, struck himself twice on the head with the brim, and replacing it, walked out.

Mrs. Armes did not remember him a moment later. When her husband joined her, she said that Mr. Statchard had taken the small Assembly.

George Armes had the brown eyes, cropped hair, straight thin mouth, so often found in association with horsey occupations. A deep furrow descending in a curve from each nostril to the corner of the lip made the lower part of his face look as though it had been moulded on a stirrup iron. Seen in profile, the line of the cheek bone to the jaw appeared to be compressed as by a chin strap. For the rest, stooping slightly and thin-legged, he was serious and taciturn, perpetually engrossed in the problem of whether he were over-reaching some one, or being over-reached. On hearing his wife’s statement, he permitted his mouth to expand into what was, for him, a smile.

“Speak the old man fair !” he said ; “he’ll take pretty nigh the whole house for this election.”

Both of them were, however, more engrossed in the business in hand, the departure of the “Fly” coach for London. The guard came for parcels, there

were accounts to settle, Ben and the boys were busy, and Armes himself, a stalk of hay in his mouth, his hands in his breeches-front, stood on the steps, beneath the aged vine that flourished unaccountably in that airless place, last relic of some prior's garden that the George had overlaid.

Ben had hardly "let 'em go" as bidden, and the sound of the wheels still echoed under the arch of the entry, when the yard was invaded by all sorts of inconsiderable persons who had learned by experience that they would not be permitted while the important matter of getting the "Fly" away was the chief thought of every one at the George. Here were country women with baskets of vegetables, poultry, herbs and flowers. Here was a gipsy woman, selling ribbons and little mirrors, brooches and trinkets to the maids, and under cover of such small commerce, giving a hint here and there about pretty faces and fortunes that may be known, that set the girls giggling in a cluster about the stairway, until Mrs. Armes, sensing some relaxation of the proper bustle in the upper floor, ordered her off in no measured terms, and she went, leering and spitting curses like a cat, terrifying enough with the gleams of black eyes and odd ornaments about her outlandish clothes. Meanwhile Ben had sent away the carriage that the George kept for hire, bidding the driver call for Mr. Statchard, and was now seeing the last of the sweepings carted off.

Armes strolled to the entry, bareheaded, nodded to

acquaintances, passed with them a word about the weather, two words about horses, strolled back; Mrs. Armes made her daily pilgrimage of fault-finding, all round the two floors of the place. It was about the slack hour of mid-morning, when a different class of customer, a more home-bred variety, demanding other attention than either host or hostess, ostler or maid could give, began to congregate in the yard.

It was noticeable that the newcomers affected darkish clothes, wideish hats, put their hands behind them rather than in their pockets, were unused to the George and in fact lacked some unifying idea, some leading personality, for which they were waiting. They did not wait long before the debonair Mr. Vardigans made his appearance. With him were a tall good-looking man, who carried his head well back, as though inviting the whole world to have a good look at him, and who struck the pavement with a stick, as the *Suisse* in a French cathedral; and also a thin stooping one, who looked mean and considerable until he turned his head and showed a smile so intelligent and welcoming that few could resist it.

Young Mr. Vardigans spoke to the former with respect, in which there lurked a faint shade of banter.

"I think, Mr. Ramplingham, we might step up!"

The person addressed turned his body from the waist to address his stooping neighbour.

"Mr. Varley, Vardigans says we might step up!"

Mr. Varley smiled a charming acquiescence, and young Mr. Vardigans led the way. The other mem-

bers of the Committee followed them in twos and threes and entered a lofty room on the first floor, the large-panelled walls of which were painted a light colour, beneath an elaborate cornice. A long table covered with green baize, around which were set a score of chairs, did not fill the centre. Mr. Rampingham hesitantly took the head of the table, with his back to the marble pilasters and carving of the fireplace, and Mr. Varley went immediately to the lower end by the door, while the others drifted uncertainly about, discussing in couples the business that was to be transacted, and young Mr. Vardigans led the Chairman step by step through the written Agenda, with the care one might have bestowed on a lost child. This uncertainty did not last long. There was a rattle of wheels below and steps on the stairs. Armes himself ushered in Mr. Statchard and Theodore Carston, and a buzz of anticipation ran around the table as the members gathered together, their heads craned and lips whispering.

To such a gathering thus disposed, did young Theodore enter beside old Mr. Statchard. The youth held himself well, and whatever trepidation he felt was well concealed. Within the hired conveyance his journey had been like that of the horse-breaker's drag of the period, in which a mettlesome young horse was harnessed to a sedate old one, in order to accustom him to the traffic, the blinkers, and the rattling of the two pairs of wheels at his tail. Having the young man beside him, as it were, har-

nessed to the pole, Mr. Statchard, in the character of the old horse, treated him with a shade less ceremony than had been used inside the Rectory. As they bowled briskly along the road, Theodore had looked out of the window, at the English countryside so dear to him after the glaring light, the stiff vegetation, the hard contrasts and primary colours of foreign lands. Mr. Statchard, he felt, was looking at him, but for a while neither of them spoke. Theodore had at moments a dim picture of the meeting to which he was going, a picture founded upon his reading of the constitutional crises of Greek and Rome. He almost saw himself in a loose tunic and sandals, amid appropriate buildings, in the open air, addressing a row of toga'd, middle-aged, bareheaded men. He had no clear vision of them because they would, naturally, all think alike and expect the same thing of him. The reverie was destroyed by the pleasant music of horses' hoofs, a jingling, and a word of command. The carriage passed down a lane formed by a column of cavalry that had, on meeting it, opened out to let it pass. Lazily good-humoured, the troopers glanced at the vehicle and joked with that nonchalance of those whose lives are lived in obedience to order and who have to take no further thought. The officers, old or young, commissioned or not, gave their attention to the *tenué* of their men. Theodore remarked upon the fine appearance of the horses, the gallant deportment of the riders.

"I am always proud to see the independent air of

the British soldier, who has chosen as his career the defence of his country. They compare favourably with the military of foreign nations, the servants of effete oligarchy, if not of religious tyranny." Mr. Statchard replied:

"The sheriff asked the commanding officer to have them removed. They are too fond of using those spurred boots of theirs on little or no provocation. They will be quartered at Seaton during the election."

"I suppose feeling runs very high?"

"We shall hope to take advantage of that!"

"Do you feel, Mr. Statchard, that the cause of Reform is well advanced?"

"I think the movement of the times is against the Blue party. But we must neglect no means!"

"I feel confident that an appeal to the electors, based on the inestimable advantages we derive from Progress dissociated from Violence, will have an overwhelming effect upon right-thinking men!"

He turned to emphasise the enthusiasm he was beginning to feel for the cause with which he had been so hastily identified. He met Mr. Statchard's unfathomable glance. The eyes did not blink. After a silence the lips moved.

"That will make a good beginning!"

A vista opened before Theodore. He continued:

"As the contest develops, it may be necessary to bring other arguments into play?"

Mr. Statchard nodded.

"For instance, a point may be made of the necessity

for broadening the franchise, on the basis that the more points of view that can be expressed, the more complete an opinion can be arrived at upon any measure which it may be desired to put forward?"

"Very true!" was the reply; "but I should hardly embark upon such matters with the Committee at the outset. They do not desire the expression of a number of views which may not be their own!"

Slightly damped, Theodore inquired what other points he might urge. Mr. Statchard suddenly became impressive, far weightier than his age and meagre habit.

"Young man!" he said, "leave it to me!"

Theodore left it. His inexperience was so complete that he felt bound to be guided by one so much his senior. He left it until too late. Before he could formulate any other of the many questions he desired to put to Mr. Statchard, there came into view, from a rise in the ground, a tall spire piercing the sky, a heavy-browed old castle frowning down, and beneath and around, a widening cluster of steep red roofs, from which shot up some thirty lower towers of grey stone. Less formal than a Continental city, more individual, a confusion of the ideas of many stubborn but not unkindly minds, the city stood before them. All about, the suburbs closed in, the traffic thickened. To be chosen to represent all this seemed to Theodore no mean destiny. In the narrow streets, men and women turned to observe their passage. A busy trade was plying, a church bell

tolled, children scampered, and hawkers cried. The hired carriage came out into a wide Market Place, under the shadow of an ancient Moot Hall, slackened and turned in under an archway.

"Here we are!" said Mr. Statchard.

The carriage stopped at some broad steps and they got out.

Ushered upstairs by a person Mr. Statchard addressed as "Host Armes," they entered a room half full of people. The reception they received Theodore felt to be heartening. True, he had to readjust his ideas. The togas were missing. The black broadcloth in which the majority of the Committee were dressed struck a different note. Nor was the room, called by Armes the Small Assembly, like a forum. The winter sunlight discovered with pale slanting rays a good deal of dust whirling in spirals at every movement, a cough even, while there hung in the air, quite undisturbed, a stale flavour of indoors. There being nothing on the walls that caught the eye, Theodore's gaze wandered over the persons of the Committee. No. They were not Senators. They were not anything he could name. They were just a score of men, surprisingly different. He tried to concentrate his attention on the business that was being transacted. But this seemed to partake of the dusty airlessness of the room, the blankness of the walls. The minutes, letters of apology, correspondence, read by a person addressed as Vardigans, in a voice that reminded him of the recitation of prayers

in foreign churches, failed to hold his attention. He had been introduced to each person present, but from want of practice had failed to retain any clear impression of individuals after the first two or three. Ramplingham the Chairman, Statchard at his elbow; next on the window side, young Doughty the banker, good-looking and well-dressed; the grave, greyish face, delicate lips and shining eyes of Mr. Allday, minister of some dissenting body whose name he had not retained; then blank and blank again until, at the foot of the table, a bent man lifted a face that won his confidence directly, the face of a man to whom he could talk and be sure of being understood. He was aroused from this survey by hearing Ramplingham's voice substituted for Vardigans', and the Agenda for routine.

Ramplingham was speaking. Standing, head well back, the speaker enunciated a word — then two or three — haltingly, as though perpetually afraid of what the meaning might be. Tiny globules of saliva flew from the moving lips, as though the proverbial pearls of speech were falling. With a slight shock Theodore found that Ramplingham was introducing him. Neither shy nor uncertain, Theodore could have introduced himself in half the time, and found it difficult and irksome to sit there and have it done for him. Finally Ramplingham sat down, having described him as a gentleman of independent means, good family and excellent education, deeply imbued (the word used was imbrewed) with

those liberal principles that the Committee held so dear.

The introduction was succeeded by a buzz of conversation. So far as Theodore could discover, Ramplingham had omitted some definite step, Statchard could be heard urging it and Ramplingham objecting. "Nomination" was the word that reached his ears. How long this might have gone on, Theodore was unable, in his embarrassment, to guess, but it was interrupted by the opening of the double door by Armes, who advanced several paces into the room, with some little ceremony to deliver.

"Gentlemen — His Lordship!"

Armes drew aside, revealing Lord Carstone. By comparison with the self-conscious uncertainty of the Committee men, the nobleman's attitude and intentions were refreshingly clear-cut. He did not attempt to minimise the distance that separated his outlook from theirs. His manner had all the advantages of bland autocracy. He knew what he wanted, and meant to attain his personal end. The effect was most marked on Ramplingham, who backed out of the Chair like a restive horse. Some members rose to their feet, but Varley, Doughty the banker and above all Statchard, had more assurance, rose sufficiently to bow, and resumed their seats, while the latter sternly motioned Ramplingham back to his. A glance from the lawyer to Vardigans was sufficient to instruct that sardonically perceptive young man to place a chair for the newcomer on the Chairman's

left hand. The Minister of the Gospel alone remained patiently but firmly hostile. His Lordship seated himself.

Mr. Statchard covered the Chairman's nervousness with business-like rapidity:

"My lord, you arrive most opportunely. We are about to draw up the list for Nomination!"

"I came for that purpose."

"Mr. Vardigans, are you ready?"

Vardigans showed his pen poised above a clean sheet of paper.

"His Lordship will stand first."

Vardigans wrote.

"Mr. Ramplingham next."

Theodore watched the Chairman's face. He read on it a desire to stand before His Lordship on the list, conquered by a stronger incapacity for saying so.

"Mr. Doughty?"

The banker bowed with a complaisance stiffened, Theodore felt, by the aloofness of one more accustomed to be sued than to sue. Mr. Statchard dictated to Vardigans:

"Mr. Joseph Doughty, Banker, of Easthampton. Not his residence." and took a semicircular glance. "Mr. Varley, Merchant, Riverside, Easthampton!"

Mr. Varley bowed, but here, surprisingly, His Lordship interposed:

"Mr. Varley's well-known attainments surely merit some more striking description?"

"Not a matter of interest to the electors, my Lord!"

His Lordship and Varley smiled at each other in astonishing community. His Lordship retired into himself, but Statchard went on:

"The Reverend Peter Allday, Minister of the Gospel!"

"Before my name is added to the list," said the minister in an effortless, audible tone, evidently the result of training and exercise, "I should require to know whether we go into this contest with clean hands. I must reprobate most severely those devices that play upon the cupidity or the fears of the electors. What assurance may we have that the canvass will be conducted on those lines ——"

At this point a confused murmur made itself heard. The members at the foot of the table, men of less importance than those seated near the Chairman, had nevertheless some ideas of their own and were trying, not very happily, to express them by all muttering at once. Mr. Statchard helped them severely.

"If you will speak a little more distinctly, there may be some chance for us to hear what you have to say!" Complete silence resulted from the lawyer's precise tones. Then:

"What are we to do if the other side is up to all sorts of dirty tricks?" came an interpolation from the lower end of the table.

"Mr. Allday may rest assured that nothing to which he objects shall come to his knowledge if I can prevent it!" interposed Mr. Statchard.

But the members at the lower end of the table were

now rousing from the lethargy that besets the lesser components of such a meeting. Another voice uttered:

"If they get their man in by such means, we can have a petition!"

"We now return to my point!" remarked Mr. Allday. "If we use means, they may unseat our candidate. That will not only be vexatious, but a grave moral ——"

With biting emphasis Mr. Statchard cut through the desultory wrangle.

"Do you get our man in," he said to the room at large, "and leave them to get him out!"

His emphasis was so heavy that the matter was not again referred to, and the completion of the list was proceeded with. They followed one another, shopkeepers, masters of small businesses, a schoolmaster, a maltster. Armes came to add his name at the end. Theodore marvelled at the occasional glimpse he got of the motives which prompted these men to leave the actual businesses by which they lived, to attend such a meeting, and the curious struggles that he witnessed to conceal the true motive behind a more laudable one, generally too difficult of expression to render the deception other than innocent. Finally, prompted by Statchard, Ramplingham rose and said that the list of those willing to nominate Mr. Theodore Carston as their candidate in the forthcoming election of a member to represent the borough in Parliament was so strong that the ward Committees

might be instructed to take the necessary steps for a canvass in Mr. Carston's name. At this there was a general commotion and break-up of formality. Some of the members went out. Those whom Theodore understood best, the banker, Lord Carstone, Mr. Varley, gathered together in a knot at the head of the table and were apparently occupied in the discussion of funds. He felt alone and out of it. His vision of the toga'd citizens in the forum had melted away. Some of the Committee had shaken his hand, or said they were happy to meet him, others had passed out, before him, apparently too shy or undecided to offer any valediction. Then at his elbow he felt rather than found the persuasive personality of Mr. Varley, who voiced at once his very thoughts:

"You see, it is not so simple as it looks!"

"No, indeed. I expected clearer expression of some downright views."

"That you might have got, had your fortune cast you with the opposite party — nay, if you were at this moment occupying the equivalent position at the King's Head."

"The King's Head!"

"Yes, the inn at the corner of the Market Place. The headquarters of the Blue interest."

"They know more of their own minds, do they?"

"It is easier for them. The Blue party represent solid interests which desire not to be disturbed. We on the other hand are composed of all those who de-

sire a change. They are united in the defence of one thing, the *status quo*; we are divided by our desire for something which does not yet exist, and which we therefore all see differently."

"Indeed, I thought that the Buff party was united upon the issue of the Bill!"

"That is so, but the Bill itself has yet to become law. However stoutly we may allege that we can foretell its operation, in point of fact we are all hoping that it will produce different effects."

"That is very interesting!"

But at this moment, Varley's expression altered.

"I fear I have been speaking pedantically. I would far rather that you formed your own conclusions, so long as you rest assured of my unwavering support of your candidature."

So saying he turned away, motioning Theodore toward the groups which were moving slowly from the room, talking among themselves. Lord Carstone, with Statchard and Doughty, were already at the door, Ramplingham was engaged with Vardigans and the Reverend Mr. Allday in some debate upon the minutes the clerk was writing. Meanwhile, Armes and his wife, with a man whom they addressed as Ben and whom Theodore had noticed in the yard on his arrival, a chief ostler perhaps, and apparently general factotum, were standing by, evidently awaiting instructions. At a word from Statchard, who detached himself from the others, the people of the inn began to busy themselves. Theodore conceived that the detail upon which they were engaged was

not for him, but he heard the lawyer's incisive flattish voice behind him:

"Well — what have you left?" and saw, as Armes and his lady hastened to reply, that Ben was carrying in and displaying on the table, rolls of material which, undone, turned out to be banners upon staves, banners to hang by the corners, streamers and tasselled cords of buff colour and bewildering variety. At the same time Ramplingham joined them and echoed Statchard, so that the matter proceeded somewhat as a duet:

Statchard: "Now where is the large flag for the bearer?"

Ramplingham: "The large flag, Armes!"

Statchard: "There should be twenty-four hand flags, on smaller staves."

Ramplingham: "For the outriders, the coachbox, and the men on foot!"

And so on, while Armes assured them that the objects demanded were forthcoming, and Mrs. Armes drove Ben with "Now then, in the big press at the stair-head," or "Them big staves was in your loft, Ben, or was they upon the top landing next the gals' garrets?"

The process appeared to be having a reviving effect on Ramplingham, who had regained confidence, become jocose, advising Mrs. Armes to get fresh ribbons for her cap, while Statchard more gravely demanded if she had many new servants, and if she were sure of them.

Before him, descending the stairs, Lord Carstone

was proposing to the banker some line of action that the other was agreeing to with a dignified alacrity, as who should say that Lord Carstone, being Lord Carstone, might have whatever he asked within certain limits. What those limits were did not appear, but that there were such limits was evident from the fact that the banker was saying: "I will have the necessary letters prepared for your signature!"

Even so, before he went, the great man had a smile and a word for Theodore. Then his carriage disappeared under the archway.

"Come!" said Varley, "let us go to luncheon."

As they emerged into the Market Place, Ben the ostler passed them, touching his cap. He was on his way to Naggs, the harness-maker in the upper market, to see about putting the set belonging to the carriage and pair in condition for the ardours of the ensuing campaign. In the half-light that the old spun-glass panes allowed, in the low-ceilinged shop where Naggs worked, more by faith than by sight, amid leather, cloth, straw, rivets, and the smells natural to them and himself, Ben found an acquaintance, no other than a certain Dan, who occupied at the King's Head, now taken over by the Blues, a position similar to his own at the George. With the obscure loyalty of their kind, the two cronies would, for the next few weeks, regard each other with mute suspicion. Each knew what the other was doing there, and Ben lingered at the door whistling loudly, to show his complete unconcern for the instructions that the opposite

party might be giving to the saddler. As Dan passed him in the doorway, however, there was one matter which he could not refrain from handing on, and he uttered in that telegraphic undertone, used by those who deal with horses:

“Count the carriers in, Dan!”

Dan, red-headed and morose, gave him one understanding look, and passed across the Market Place, his gaze upon the cobbles.

IV

The Residence

"SHALL we walk?" inquired Mr. Varley of Theodore. "My house is at no great distance, and you may find the air refreshing."

"Indeed I shall. I must own that I found this morning's business both exacting and disconcerting!"

"I feared you might. I have always felt an immense interval between that Liberty that we all profess, and the realisation of such profession in daily life. You would hardly have guessed, from this morning's proceedings, that we were attempting to add a buttress to that constitution which is the admiration of the world, and the guardian of a system that must seem to you, after the experience of those of other lands, to be the most fitting for our island situation!"

"Such is in fact my feeling!" Theodore replied warmly: "How proud I am to tread once again this soil, to breathe this air, to see around me these familiar scenes. Had I been called upon to express definitely my views, I should have described the Bill, from what I have been able to learn of its enactments, rather as a conservation of our privileges from the grasp of a body too small, and too restricted both in outlook and requirements, than an attempt to over-

turn all that we hold so dear. You must understand," he added, as his liking for his new-found friend grew in him, "that my knowledge of all this world is of the slightest. In fact, had it not been for Lord Carstone's suggestion — and you must be aware how heavily any project of his weighs with me — I do not suppose I should have thrust myself into this arena!"

Mr. Varley gave him a look of complete accord, and appeared to be about to ask some pertinent question, but changed this intention and substituted:

"Mr. Doughty asked that I would bring you to him at his office. Here it is!"

They had left the Market Place for what Theodore remembered as the main street of the town. Here were many of the better shops, the offices of lawyers, the houses of doctors, ample, well-built and contrasting with the earlier gable-ended plastered buildings, often largely of wood, and with the upper storey projecting, that still lingered around the Market Place. Among the square-fronted brick-built dwellings that now surrounded him, none struck Theodore as more eminently respectable than that to which Mr. Varley led him; there was nothing of the money-lender's den, nor the lottery-promoter's casino about it. In fact the place had an almost domestic air, save for the brass plate on the door, "J. & J. Doughty, Bank," and for the fact that, after entering the high and wide doorway that opened under a semicircular, white-painted portico, he found himself not in a

gentleman's dining-room, but in a very sober and discreet type of office that had been formed by doing away with the partition walls which separated the two front rooms of the house from the hall, and from each other. The clerks, surprisingly numerous to Theodore's ideas, were barely visible behind glass screens, and it was only when Mr. Varley stepped up to the handsome mahogany counter, not unlike the taffrail of a ship, that a very courteous and well-dressed chief clerk appeared and asked in what way Mr. Varley could be served. Desiring to see the partners, Theodore and his friend were ushered with a stately bow through a door at the back into a room described as the "parlour." Short though his passage through the office had been, Theodore, whose perceptions, never dull, were preternaturally acute that morning, had not failed to notice a certain stir among the clerks, a bobbing of heads and whispering of which he could but suppose himself to be the object. In a moment, he drew his own conclusion. This was naturally the next place in the town, after the George, to learn of his candidature. He understood the interest he roused. He blushed at the reflex effect of that interest upon himself. He was no longer plain Theodore Carston, protégé of Lord Carstone and pupil of the Reverend Mr. Burgess. He was a candidate for Parliament.

In this mood he passed through the door held open for him behind Mr. Varley.

He found himself in a room not over-large, but

well-appointed and comfortably furnished in a style that matched the exterior of the building, its occupants, and the atmosphere in which they moved, one that allowed a well-founded and steadily increasing prosperity to exist amid all the conditions of moderate and comfortable domesticity. True, it contained desks, but those desks, though large and heavy, had more the air of private escritoirs than of merchants' counters. A heavy carpet was on the floor. Some books of reference, in a tall lattice-fronted bookcase, lost all their forbidding air of dry routine by reason of their juxtaposition with volumes of devotional exercises, and folios of travel and engraving. The bow window looked out upon a well-kept garden. The three occupants of the room, when Mr. Varley and Theodore entered, were Mr. Joseph Doughty, who hastened to introduce his brother, Mr. John Doughty, and a third person, presented as Our Mr. Dormer. Mr. John Doughty, while the elder brother and senior partner, as Theodore learned, seemed rather to be of an older generation. His thin face, in which the eyes were the most vivid feature, his bowed shoulders and dress that appeared almost shabby, not from poverty or carelessness but from a deliberate contempt for appearances, struck the note of lack of usage and of renunciation of the wealth and power by which he was surrounded. He rose, however, with an air of courtesy and solicitous care for his visitors' spiritual welfare. But it was the third figure that riveted Theodore's attention.

There were no half-shades or undecided outlines about the very much older man, who bobbed rather than bowed the greeting which he seemed unwilling to rise and give. His lips did not move. His little deep-set eyes seemed incurious; not so much hostile, as armed with a complete foreknowledge of what the newcomer would require and how far the requirement might be acceded to. Theodore was instantly reminded of the attitude of certain types that he had met during his travels, though which types he was unable, at the moment, to fix exactly. But he retained a strong impression of something earlier, and at the same time more permanent than the Doughty's, a personality petrified, as it were, sharing the slow, insensibly changing life of inanimate nature, a being whose traditions were immemorial, like those of the peasant and the priest of Continental countries. His dull-coloured clothes, of ancient style and age-long durability, showed neither John Doughty's contempt for personal appearance, nor Joseph's hearty delight in, and use of wealth for self-adornment, but rather the steady habit of one who wore certain garments because they befitted a fixed and known station in life, unlikely to change, and too long established to need explanation or embellishment.

While Joseph Doughty conducted the amenities with his somewhat stately banter, and John hastened with an irritated nervousness to hope that the political changes now foreshadowed might be productive of good to the body politic, old Mr. Dormer arranged

in his slightly trembling fingers, some papers which he had been conning over, and made a gesture that stopped the two partners, and drew their attention as completely as though he had rapped upon the desk and commanded silence. Joseph Doughty recovered first.

"Let us first dispose," he said, as if slightly chiding himself and his brother for inadvertence, "of some small items of business. You will be glad to know that Lord Carstone has placed at your disposal an income of three hundred pounds per annum, payable quarterly. He desired that you should be acquainted by us. The first instalment is due to-day."

Theodore was about to speak, but Mr. Joseph Doughty continued:

"Pray convey your thanks to His Lordship direct. We are but following instructions!" He hesitated, and the papers in the hand of Mr. Dormer became slightly agitated so that he resumed, as at a signal: "Here, therefore, is a book of cheques for the purpose of drawing upon ourselves —" he took the papers Mr. Dormer held out to him, and passed them on, one by one, to Theodore. "Here is your pass-book, by which we shall be able to show you how your account stands in our ledgers. Here is a slip of paper upon which we should be glad to have you write your habitual signature, for our reference."

Theodore obediently wrote upon the paper, pocketed pass-book and cheque-book, and with Mr. Var-

ley and Mr. Joseph Doughty took his leave of Mr. John, already immersed in some letters, while Mr. Dormer was regarding first his signature and then his person with a concentration from which it could only be assumed that both were being committed to memory.

The walk from the Bank to Mr. Varley's house was short and pleasant, by a side alley that took them across a corner of the green Castle Ditches, into a quiet street called Riverside, lined with substantial houses of those whose businesses were directly connected with the water-borne traffic and not too exigent of floor space to be carried on within the owner's dwelling. That which Mr. Varley occupied was old-fashioned, with a steep roof, round Flemish gables, and square casement windows. Three steps led up to the central door, so that the living-rooms were raised some feet above the level of the spacious cobbled yard. Large double doors, sunk half-way below its level, admitted to the cellarage, while on each side of the yard, capacious store-houses were devoted to the impedimenta of the wine merchant's trade. On passing through to the other front of the house, a different prospect was revealed. This side had been modernised, as Mr. Varley, in good-natured apologies for leading them past a small office and customers' room, was at pains to point out. Here a pleasant apartment that ran the whole length of the house, accommodated at one end a dining-table of fine dimensions, while at the other, disposed upon

shelves, racks, screens, and even upon chairs and card-tables lay the delight of the connoisseur's life, his collections of statuary and bronze, books, engravings, musical instruments, curios — even rare and choice plants growing in specially prepared bowls or vases, each worth study in itself.

From the windows, altered so as to reach from the ceiling to the floor, the view of the outside world was worthy of the interior. Immediately below there was, on one side, a cobbled slipway from the cellarage to the quay-head, and on the other a range of glass-houses of equal length, both ending at the river. In the centre was a well-kept lawn, adapted for the game of bowls, and flanked by wide flower-beds and curious and beautiful shrubs. Beyond the river, between the branches of a row of elms, the level marshland stretched away to the distance, where, upon another bend of the winding stream, an old church tower gathered about itself the red or colour-washed walls, the tiled or thatched roofs of the village of Eastwick, among its willows and alders.

It was a room in which Mr. Joseph Doughty seemed to lose the Quaker banker in the cultured friend, in which its shy and humble master suddenly appeared the tolerant dispenser of all the good things of this life. And to Theodore, young and enthusiastic, it was the pleasantest place to which he had yet gained access in a life passed within reach of the splendours of Carstone Place, the comfort of the Rectory, the varied interests of travel. Here his

spirit felt free and exalted. Bidden to the table he found dishes as choice as, if less formally prepared than, those at the seat of his patron, vintages no whit inferior, and conversation even more to his taste. Mr. Varley made excuses for his bachelor housekeeping, but the service of an elderly baize-aproned man, of monk-like face and powers of divination of what each *convive* was in need of at the moment, rendered qualification superfluous. The repast concluded, they moved without interruption of the conversation to the fireplace at the opposite end, and at the request of Mr. Doughty, were allowed to inspect some of the treasures there amassed.

Mr. Varley had for many years been obliged to make an annual journey abroad for the purpose of seeing for himself the young vintages which it was necessary for him to purchase for his stock-in-trade. By slightly extending his tour, he had been able to see many of the places of interest in Europe that Theodore had visited, and it was therefore most agreeable to both of them to supplement each other's recollections, and to find again in Mr. Varley's collection spots known to both, delineated or described, or recalled by the objects the collector had brought home. Here were the Alps or the Pyrenees, the Rhine and the Loire. Here were Lisbon and Naples, Rheims and Amsterdam. The young banker also was widely travelled and extremely intelligent, and Mr. Varley never failed to refer to the indispensable help he had received from the other, in the way of

letters of introduction, and opportunities for the handling of funds. And both were much more than mere cold observers of the impressions received by the senses, or facts of enumeration and classification. A warm human interest informed their remarks and deductions, and led inevitably to that most enthralling of all subjects, the progress of the human race. It was in this connection that, after looking through a portfolio of the engravings by Piranesi of the remains of Ancient Rome, Mr. Varley directed his companions' attention to the view from the windows:

"I never cease to be thankful," he said, "for the means by which I am enabled to enjoy so much that is beautiful, and learn so much that is instructive. There, after all, is the foundation upon which Mr. Doughty and I base all our transactions, and from which we obtain our leisure and culture!"

He indicated the slow moving barges on the river, the horse traffic of the towpath, the fields devoted to agriculture.

"Those simple laborious lives form the basis of our civilisation. Such a bald statement is mere evidence of the sense of indebtedness to them, made as befits the plain merchant that I am. But the poet Gray has sung the very theme in exquisite verse."

"Yet it is impossible to convey to them more than a faint echo of the benefits we enjoy," interposed Mr. Doughty seriously.

"You do yourself wrong," replied the wine mer-

chant. "Mr. Carston will soon become aware, if he is not already, of the many charities which you and your brother have stimulated or instituted ——"

The banker raised his hand in deprecation.

"Mr. Carston will also be aware, I trust, that we retain — whether plain Quakers like my brother, or less strict observants like myself — a lively sense of the rapid alteration in our condition. He should know that our father served his own shop, and our grandfather was no more than a journeyman ——"

Theodore hastily assured the banker that he felt that a rapid rise from humble origin to well-earned affluence could only be evidence of ability and integrity.

"Say rather, opportunity and good fortune. But to how few do such benefits come. I must own that I have differed in this matter also from my brother. He still adheres to the doctrines in which we were brought up, and relies upon education for a levelling up of the present inequalities that exist between men whom God made equal. I felt the need for more immediate action. I sat in Parliament for the town of Seaton, and hope to do so again — for only by such steps do I hope for a more equable distribution of the necessities of life which we inherit as co-heirs!"

"With me," Mr. Varley discriminated, "the guiding principle has been a regard for those deathless examples in classic lore."

While the two elders had been explaining them-

selves in rounded periods, Theodore, feeling utterly at home in their company, had permitted his gaze to wander from the distant view that had introduced the conversation, to the nearer one of the quay-head that divided Mr. Varley's garden from the river. Here was passing a scene that struck him by its contrast with the erudite and tranquil entertainment that he was so enjoying. A barge, making a landing, had fouled one that was attempting to turn in mid-stream. The master of the latter, a heavily-built fellow in rough jersey and wide trousers, leapt ashore, blaming in loud oath-laden invective the wharf-keeper, who was endeavouring to warp the vessel round with a thick rope upon a mooring-post, and prevented all argument by knocking the man down. In a second Theodore flung up the window, dropped upon the grass, and tearing off his coat as he covered the distance to the palisade in a few strides, vaulted the barrier calling:

"Here, you, put up your guard!"

The bargee turned, purple and swearing. Theodore fainted with his left, so that his adversary, lunging clumsily, came across him, enabling him to throw his whole body into a right behind the ear. Even this might have been insufficient had not the man, like all longshoremen, been better trimmed above the waist than below. Tripping upon the cable, the fellow came down upon the cobbles headforemost, lay an instant, and then rose slowly and dizzily. Theodore had remained on guard, but had

not reckoned upon the crowd that seemed to spring up from the very stones. Half a dozen tarry, uncouth amphibians advanced upon him; Mr. Varley's servant, the wharf-keeper, and a cellarman ranged themselves on his side. They were outmatched, and already the cries of "Chuck 'em in the river!" were rising, when the *mêlée* was cut short by a cold commanding voice, that caused every man to drop his fists. Of great resonance and perfect articulation, this voice proceeded from a gentleman of fine presence and perfect seat, who from his horse, that was carrying him along the towpath opposite, had thus suspended hostilities.

"Stop that!" was sufficient to make all resume their avocations. The stranger then, with raised hat, greeted Mr. Varley and Mr. Doughty, who now appeared at the bottom of the garden, and begged to make amends for the occurrence, if permission were granted to join them. A boat was instantly forthcoming, and a volunteer to lead the horse round to be stabled at Mr. Varley's. Theodore had hardly time to resume his coat, adjust his cravat, and regain the house, before the stranger was presented to him as none other than Sir Curtius Hamilton, who had, he declared, that morning been nominated by the Blue party, and was but now returning home. Theodore found him pleasant and correct.

"I must entreat you to believe that these are not Blue tactics!" were the first words.

Theodore felt obliged to meet such an approach on equal ground.

"I fear that I acted upon impulse," he admitted.

The other expressed admiration of the science he had displayed, and chaffed the banker and merchant on having selected a candidate of such energy and promptitude, qualities that could not fail to be of great service in the contest, in which unfortunately they would be opposed, and continued:

"As we are so soon to be forbidden all opportunity of better acquaintance, may I ask if you will now accompany me to another sporting exhibition that is even now taking place at a small tavern on the Moor Hall Road. It would give me great pleasure."

All were agreed, and the time that it took to put the horses into Mr. Varley's carriage was occupied in drinking glasses of an excellent Westphalian beer, of which Mr. Varley was extremely proud, on account of its great rarity, and which the company agreed was indeed a pleasant, if light, beverage.

The carriage took them back into Bishopsgate, then along to the ancient bridge that spanned the river, retracing the route followed by Theodore with Lord Carstone on the previous morning. They halted on the open road, the carriage was sent back and they proceeded to the small hostelry at which Theodore had previously seen Mr. Statchard. Here they were challenged in the bar, but allowed to pass through into what appeared to have been a large barn, built close to the hillside, in what had been a chalk-pit in earlier days. The meanness and quietude of the spot did not prepare Theodore for finding the tiers of seats placed close to the walls densely packed, while

in the centre, upon a raised platform, goaded by the shouts and yells, calls and endearments of their owners and backers, two cocks were rapidly covering the sand with feathers and blood, pecked and torn from each other in the determined fight they maintained.

Theodore had often witnessed cock-fights in barns and stables, amid labourers and grooms, and had never rated the sport much higher than ratting. His year of travel seemed to have removed him from all that side of life, and he now found the spectacle of small interest. His attention was however held by the composition of the audience, which was larger and more varied than he had ever seen at such a meeting, and was composed of persons whom he did not expect to meet at such a place. There were, it is true, the "natives" as he called them to himself, tavern-keepers and members of the fancy, and men who lived by doing all those odd jobs that have to be done wherever horses and dogs are kept for sporting purposes, wherever there are race-meetings or hunting packs. But whether from the proximity of the town or the coming election, it seemed to Theodore unusual to see so many of the professional and gentlemanly classes. The banker did not seem out of place, for his tolerant *bonhomie* of one whose business it was to know everybody's business, admitted him everywhere, Theodore could see. Mr. Varley again came in the collector's spirit. Neither of the two was betting, and like Theodore himself, appeared as interested by the audience as by the main. Sir

Curtius Hamilton wagered freely and appeared generally welcome. Ramplingham was on the opposite side of the enclosure, and Theodore guessed by his expression that he was losing money. Armes was here a person of some consequence, treated with respect, his company sought, his words, fewer than ever dropped from the lips of man, listened to. But what Theodore found more astonishing was the presence of Mr. Statchard. The lawyer seemed out of place in such environment, yet there he was, superficially interested in the sport, but actually engaged in a series of conversations with men whom Theodore put down as pugilists, or ex-members of that profession, or promoters of it. But more surprising still was the entry of Lord Carstone, as the afternoon was drawing in. The nobleman seemed to be well-known in these circles, was welcomed and had way made for him to the barrier. Urbane and frigid he moved among the crowd with his habitual detachment, viewed the sport with his inscrutable glance, and moved away. As he made the tour of the place he came to the spot where Theodore was, and without expressing astonishment, gave him a cordial smile, and passed on. The meeting was now at an end. The arena was cleared of its horrid trophies, the winners were handling their birds with loving care, or arranging for their disposal when too much damaged. Mr. Statchard had time to say:

“Well, young sir, you came in queer company. I trust you have not wasted your afternoon!”

Theodore assured him that he had found the scene most diverting, and passed on to hope that Mr. Ramplingham had enjoyed good sport. On following his companions to the narrow exit, he came up behind them, and without intending it, overheard the remarks that they were addressing to each other. Mr. Doughty mentioned "Lord Carstone" and "funds," and Mr. Varley seemed to be asking a question. So far as Theodore could tell it was: "Who do you think that he is?" The banker shrugged his shoulders, and turning with habitual caution, found Theodore at his elbow, and demanded to know what he had made of the scenes he had witnessed. Theodore replied that he found himself less able to enter into the sport than he had previously been.

"And where, may I ask, have you been used to attend?"

"Wherever security from interruption could be found. You know that I passed some years under the roof of Mr. Burgess, the Rector of Hoake?"

"Indeed. I *was* unaware. Your home, then, must be at some distance!"

"My earliest recollections are of the home farm at Carstone, then of the Grammar School in this town. But I cannot say that I recollect my parents. My father, who died in my infancy, was steward to His Lordship!"

By this time they had reached the outskirts of the town and were met by the carriage. Although pressed to stay, Theodore declined to remain with

Mr. Varley for dinner. He felt a sensation that might be due to the unaccustomed fatigues of the day, or merely to fancy. It was plain enough to his senses, as the rattle of a loom in a garret is plain to those who are near it whether they be talking or what not. It seemed to him as though he were before a great congregation, all eyes upon him, all ears strained for what he might say, all lips ready to pronounce judgment. He passed his hand across his forehead, as though to brush the feeling aside, accepted a glass of wine, and waited while the hired conveyance from the George came to carry him to the Rectory. He took leave of Mr. Varley and the banker with regret tempered by an urgent desire to be alone. In the dark carriage, going speedily along the empty road, he seemed to regain possession of himself, to recover his privacy. He was late for the Rector's usual hour, but found that the evening repast had been kept back for him. He made a hurried toilet and descended.

How cheerful seemed the quietly furnished and well-lit dining-room, how appetising the substantial country fare of the table, how pleasant the familiar voice, the well-meant platitudes of his tutor, and the discreet behaviour of Mrs. Sophie towards one who was evidently, in her eyes, already a personage. Eagerly his eyes sought Marina's, earnestly he wished for her inquiries of his day's doings and her estimation of him. But she kept her eyes upon her plate, and ventured only monosyllables upon the

more commonplace topics. Only when, having answered numerous questions, he asked how the ladies had spent their day, did he receive a glance at once so mournful and so appealing that he felt that here, at last, was a subject upon which he might safely advance somewhat further toward that intimacy with her that he so much desired.

It was not the Rector's habit to linger over the wine, of restricted quantity, but never below a certain quality, which made his daily allowance. And on this evening he begged Theodore to join the ladies at once and to entertain them as well as might be, as he himself would be obliged to devote an hour or more to Mr. Sopwith the Curate.

With what delight did not Theodore promise to do his best. The drawing-room was rather less brightly lit, the fire had been more regularly and considerably kept in, as the ladies spent some part of the afternoon there, and Mrs. Sophie, after playing a game or two of cribbage with her daughter, began to nod. The conversation for which both the young people were so eager overstrained her capacity, and gave her no chance to display the few social advantages that she derived from foreign residence. Once the cards were relinquished, and the other two began tentatively to ask some few of the hundred questions with which both were burdened, she allowed herself to close her eyes, maintaining at the same time that deportment which is expected of, and almost always attained by, the widows of the clergy, especially those

whose charge has been among the overseas possessions of the Crown. Theodore wished to know whether Marina had found and perused the book which he had laid out in that hope.

"Certainly I have!" she replied. "I felt sure that the volume was intended for me, as it was one with which my uncle would naturally be well acquainted, and which my mother would find uninteresting. To me, nothing is more enthralling than a classic story — above all, that part of it which illuminates the fate of woman!"

"And which of all the heroines of ancient story, may I ask, do you find the most interesting?"

"Cassandra!" Theodore found this unexpected.

Mrs. Sophie, roused by the animation with which the word was pronounced, opened her eyes and closed her mouth. She could not admit for one moment that she had been guilty of such a lapse as sleeping in company, and was aware that the conversation had turned upon improving subjects, always a little difficult to her, and not upon the cheerful gossip in which she could hold her own. As improving subjects could only, in her view, be connected with religion, she felt sure that the young people must be discussing the lives of the saints, and felt no hesitation in showing that she was awake by exclaiming, guided by the sound of the last word:

"St. Andrew! The patron Saint of Scotland, I believe!"

Neither of the young people knew what to make of

such an interpolation. Nor did they desire the conversation to turn in the direction indicated. A silence fell upon them, and having no further stimulus to keep her faculties employed, Mrs. Sophie inevitably closed her eyes again, her mouth falling slightly open.

"Pray tell me why your preference falls upon the prophetess?" Theodore asked of Marina.

"She alone, in my opinion, escapes from being a mere chattel. She is mastered by force, but her spirit is free. She has a mind, a voice, a will of her own!"

Presuming upon the fact that her mother was now breathing evenly in evident unconsciousness of them both, Marina turned boldly toward the young man and began to express herself without reserve:

"She speaks for all women, of all times. How often have I not envied the black servants in our quarters, who, their duty done, had no further submission demanded of them."

Theodore was astounded. The heightened colour, the burning glance that was bent upon his, allowed him a glimpse of depths the presence of which he had never suspected. But stronger than astonishment was his admiration. Little used to demand more of women than that they should be charming in appearance and complaisant in manner, he found in the girl before him something that outplumbed and transcended the vapid remark, the polite response, that was all he had been used to receive from such women as he had had trifling commerce with.

"Tell me," he cried, "to what do you aspire? There is to-day hardly opportunity for prophecy, except that of the printed page. From what tyranny do you desire to escape, since you are actually not subject to anything more restrictive than the ordinary usages of society?"

"And what," she returned, "could be more confining than those? While you have moved, acted, spoken to-day with your fellows, I have sat here and waited for the trifling occupations of women's hours to wear themselves out. Even the time I spend in reading is curtailed and grudged by my fond but uncomprehending mamma, who cannot, in truth, see the need for it, nor feel its enthralling interest!"

The point of view was new to Theodore. He had always supposed that women dwelt in a world apart. That they should aspire to the activities of a man's life had never occurred to him. For a moment he was nonplussed, but soon saw where the cause of the misunderstanding lay. He hastened to explain it to Marina:

"Do you not perceive how impossible it would be for women to enter into man's field? Reading, you agree, you are not debarred from, but as for having employment similar to that which occupies men, how unimaginable would be a market-place, a country house, a college or a sporting engagement thronged with women!"

He little expected the argument that would be opposed to this. Marina gripped the arms of her

chair, and facing him more fully than ever, spoke with even greater vehemence:

"It is indeed difficult to imagine the market-place in which women did not do the larger share of the selecting, fetching, and bargaining for the objects that are bought and sold. The counting-house may be filled with men, but many women serve in shops. The college has been lost to my unfortunate sex since the suppression of the nunneries and abbeys, but still many a well-born lady rides to hounds. In fact the rich and poor women have retained some of the privileges they used to possess. It is our own class of respectable gentility in which all has been lost!" The rush of words, the new thoughts, above all the deep attraction which the speaker had for him, held Theodore spell-bound. She continued: "But even if your supposition were correct, is it not true that while the life of business, sport, learning and politics be arrogated to man, that of the home is equally closed to him. He cannot cook, nurse, keep house. Is he then obliged to pass his whole life in the open?"

Theodore found the argument unanswerable, but was unwilling to own his discomfiture, above all to Marina, for stronger from moment to moment became the desire within him to shine in her eyes, occupy her attention, and capture her tenderest sentiments. He took refuge in:

"Let us say, rather, that woman delegates to man the duty of toil and drudgery, of fighting and law-making, of teaching, while she dwells, removed, se-

cluded, the object of his most sacred vows, at once his reward and his encouragement."

Marina's head drooped upon her hand. Her recent outburst appeared to have exhausted her. In a tone of deep melancholy, she sighed.

"How hollow it all sounds. I never remember seeing my father regard my mother as a reward or an encouragement. The girl Warman, who serves in this house — what future can she have before her? Will she dwell apart, the object of the sacred vows of some labourer? Do you suppose I have not seen many a man appraise me, as so much merchandise, even sound my parents as to my eligibility to fill the place he had half decided to select for me ——"

But Theodore could bear no more. If she was desirable at a distance, how much more so was she in the pleasant propinquity of the drawing-room; if beautiful in animation, did she not wring the heart in her bewitching langour? He longed to put his arms about her, entreat her to lay her head and all its cares upon his bosom, where, at the moment, his heart beat so strongly that he felt himself capable of being the supporter, cherisher and defender of any woman, even of more than one, if need be. But at that moment the door opened, and the Rector entered. On seeing the young people so closely engaged, so obviously oblivious to Mrs. Sophie's gradual slipping, in profound slumber, towards the edge of the chair, he made no observation, and uttered no reproof. He seemed on the contrary to congratulate

them discreetly. He had a paper in his hand which speedily recalled him to business.

“Theodore, I have just received this note from Mr. Statchard. The writ is expected in the morning, and he begs that you will be in readiness at a quarter to nine, to accompany him upon urgent business connected with the election.”

The Moot Hall

FROST lay white upon the leaded roof and stone battlements of the Moot Hall of Easthampton that morning. So cold was it that old Parmenter, the Keeper, went twice to the Lord Wellington for a drop of rum, and took it hot. Nor was this merely idle luxury, for Parmenter was a busy man, and had been up and about long before it was light. For fully half the year, his day's work began by the rays of a sooty lamp, in cold and darkness. For the other half, he had the sweet morning light that flooded the wide Market Place, and the scent of the surrounding country that blew unpolluted over the packed roofs of the town. But old Parmenter was impervious to seasons, and at all times went about, in his sleeved waistcoat, tight trousers and shoes, with his wooden face set in such an expression of permanent disagreement with life as might have suited the figurehead of a ship condemned to voyage perpetually through unbroken dirty weather. Every man on earth has his own destiny and his own way of meeting it, and no one had ever discovered whether old Parmenter had had some especial bad luck, or some kink in his nature that made him dislike what seemed a sufficient station in the world. Certainly no one of similar employment in the town appeared to harbour much continuous resentment. Whalebelly, the Bank

watchman, drowned his feelings until he resembled a perambulating alcoholic marsh, but was cheerful enough with it. Old Crymer the sexton of St. George's by the Bridewell, spoke in a reedy whisper, as though he had inadvertently buried not merely one foot, but his windpipe, in one of his graves, but was always respectful. Ben, the ostler at the George, worked like a horse but had a horse's dumb serviceableness. Only old Parmenter, of all that humble world, bore from day to day his everlasting grudge.

Perhaps Mr. Varley, leisured, wealthy, sympathetic, and eternally curious, got as near to a solution of the riddle as any one, when he prepared the material for the paper which he read to the Mutual Improvement Society on "The Moot Hall of Easthampton, its History and Characteristics." Mr. Varley had ferreted among old parchments, measured every dimension, examined every piece of decoration and ornament and sounded every wall of the old place. He had traced the origin of the underground chamber that formed the base of the northern square tower, called St. Catherine's Chapel, to an anchorite's cell; he had proved beyond a doubt that the largest, and eastern tower, somewhat curiously surmounted by a small pepper-box belfry, had been built by the Plantagenets as a toll-booth for collecting taxes; that the main body of the building, that housed the upper and lower courts, was no earlier than 1400 A.D. and had been built by the Fish-

mongers Guild of St. Nicholas, which in its turn, explained why, among the regalia, there figured a silver trident, that was borne behind the Mayor, but before the maces, on state occasions. Further, he revealed the various queer names by which the portions of the rambling conglomerate old edifice had been known. How the southern tower, known as "Mumford," now in ruins, of which the ground floor was occupied by the new police, had been that in which Simon de Montford had held his almost regal court. Again, the rusty iron hooks beside the door where lawyers' clerks ran in and out, were described in the original edition (the folio) of Hunt's Memorials, of which Mr. Varley was one of the few possessors, as those on which Jonathan Bareback, the Lollard, had been hung over a slow fire; while as for the lower court itself, the unsparing Mr. Varley had shown that its nickname, the "den," was evidence of the awful stresses of the Plague in Easthampton, when all suspected of infection had been driven into that safe place, and locked up there, so that they went back to a state of nature, became as caged beasts, with matted hair for clothes, fighting tooth and nail for food that the charitable thrust through their bars, at once a scandal and a laughing-stock to the gross Restoration populace.

Now had Mr. Varley merely delivered all this information to the learned Society, Parmenter would not have heard of it. The printed transactions meant nothing to one who could not read. But Mr.

Varley was obliged, so great was the interest he had aroused, to conduct a party of sightseers, explaining to them how he had arrived at his conclusions, and which portions of the building illustrated the points of interest upon which he had touched. Parmenter could not refuse the keys to a company that included an ex-Mayor, a Knight, Doughty the Banker, and who knows what other members of the gentry and merchant class. But his disapproval was obvious to some, at least, though not to the innocent cause of it. Mr. Doughty asked Mr. Varley if he had not noticed Parmenter's expression. Mr. Varley replied that he had not. The banker enlightened him.

"He looked sour when we entered the building. He was ungracious when asked to open the doors. But what really displeased him was your description of his dwelling-place as an anchorite's cell, and the stone on which he cuts up the food for the lock-up, as the lepers' stone. He seemed to me to take personal umbrage!"

"A limited mind! My belief is that he considers the building as his private property, and ourselves to be interlopers!"

Thus far Mr. Varley to Mr. Doughty. From that time forward, Parmenter's malice seemed to have a personal object. His first business, so early this morning, was with the market people, who had to pay him small sums in pence for the space they occupied, according as they stood, squatted upon three-legged stools, or maintained some sort of shelter

resembling a coffin standing on end, with a sail-cloth awning. These he regarded as an alien race making deliberate invasion of his territory. Short and gruff was his speech with them, many a grumble and retort did he get from the hard old country women, who had trudged some miles to get there, and who would have regarded it as nothing less than impiety to return home with any of their wares unsold. And never was the weekly contest between them and Parmenter more acrimonious than at this dead end of the year, when the walnuts and medlars had been sold, last crops of their little old gardens, and nothing was to be brought to market except such hens as were not likely to lay again, a few winter greens, some dried herbs or pickles in jars. Parmenter had justification for his dumb bullying glance, his harsh monosyllabic threats. The women were not poor. They could pay for their standings. But not without an argument. That was, perhaps, as much satisfaction to them as the empty basket and full purse they hoped to carry home. So that as Parmenter, dim, tonguetied arbiter of that world, passed among them in the grey pinching dawn, where everything that had been furred white was beginning to drip, there seemed to hang about his head a buzz of broad East Anglian objurgation, as the flies swarm about the head of a cow, questing along the edge of the meadow pond.

“That I never! I kep’ my basket on me arm. So now then! That’s not more than tuppence!” And so forth rang the chorus.

The wrangle was cumulative. Those who thought they had been ill-used, crowded after him, warning the others, threatening, criticising the later awards he made. It came to its worst at the standing of one very old woman, shawled and bonneted, who from very age, had arrived late, and as yet sold nothing. Parmenter, from long and intimate knowledge of the native, was insisting that she must pay before she sold and that she could pay, for, poor and hardworking as the women might be, not one of them was penniless. He was about to take her by the shoulders, and push her off the market, when a mild but authoritative voice behind him said:

“What is the matter?”

There stood Mr. Varley. The old woman was voluble. Parmenter was without the habit of speech. Mr. Varley soon checked her, made out what the source of the trouble was, and paid the toll that Parmenter was demanding. There was a chorus of noisy applause, the crowd of women, the loungers and hangers-on of the Market Place, with that invincible English delight in the discomfiture of any sort of authority, simmered and swirled in approval. Mr. Varley looked about him, curious, amazed. He had made an appointment, weeks before, with the old woman, who was to bring him some specially dried herbs, the nutritive and medicinal qualities of which she had boasted. He wished to believe her, would write a paper upon them possibly, but first he must have them in his hand, test, and examine them, make

a study of them before he made an advertisement. He had paid the woman's toll because he wanted to get what he had come for. Wise, learned in all but the academic sense, voracious of any information, his real humility had turned him blind to the possibility of becoming a popular hero (a type he despised) as the result of spending a few pence in paying Parmenter to go away, so that he could get speech with the old woman. With surprise and alarm he heard himself being called the champion of the poor and oppressed. They were proposing to carry him home shoulder-high. Frightened, now, he hastened to make his bargain with the woman. She was talking so hard that he had to pull her by the arm to obtain her attention. When he did so she thrust the herbs into his hand, loudly refusing all payment. He threw some coins into her basket and bored his way out of the crowd, followed by a further burst of enthusiasm.

Parmenter, meanwhile, on receiving the payment due to him, regarded the coins in his hand with surly disfavour. The expression on his face was that of the donkey who is thrashed at the last ascent of a long hill. To be an official of any sort in Easthampton was no sinecure, scarcely a privilege. To be a small official was a hard life. Like all his kind, Parmenter kept his place from sheer incapacity to imagine himself in any other. He had been doing his plain duty, as he had done for many years, as his predecessors had done for longer than he could count. The market people were awkward, abusive and

shifty. They all were, the women worse than the men, that particular old woman the worst of the lot. She played her poverty, her age, pretended ignorance and ill-health for all they were worth, got the ear of the gentry, had a sharp tongue, and a nasty look. He had caught her out that morning, and had been executing plain obvious justice upon her. Markets had to be paid for, every one knew that; if they weren't, why there was an end to the toll collector, Parmenter to wit, and he was, like all his sort, incapable of envisaging his own extinction. And then that Mr. Varley came along and saved her! The thing was an obvious defeat of law and order. But worse was to follow. As he continued his collection, low-browed and glaring, he found that the spirit of the Market, the tone of the day was against him. The quarrel in which he had been involved had spread its rumours, far beyond the group in which it had occurred, had become fiction rather than history, had served the purpose of that eternal contest between him and the market people. As he went from one to the other, he was now openly accused of breach of duty, brutality, officialism, terrorism, informing, and finally of theft. It was not that any individual really believed that old Parmenter had done anything dreadful, or even unusual. They knew him too well, and if they did not like, were accustomed to him. The motive was rather jealousy of the old woman. If she could have her market toll paid by Mr. Varley, so could others. The great thing was to make one-

self heard. Parmenter found half the unsavoury names in the large vocabulary of the Market hurled at his head. Every standing to which he went was vacated at his approach. The occupants circled round him, jeering and hooting. He could not push a hundred and fifty or so of them off the Market. He could not pull down their stalls or confiscate their goods. A cabbage struck him on the back of the head. A butcher set a dog on him. Laboriously he cornered one or two of the poorer or weaker of the crowd and got their money. It was hard work. He was obliged to pass over a good many until a better opportunity. Finally, here was the bell of St. George by the Bridewell striking eight, the cathedral echoing it half a mile away. He hurried off to his breakfast, down the stone steps beneath the belfry tower of the Moot Hall, into the underground labyrinth of the old place. In the semi-darkness at the foot of the stairs, he ran into a man in a tail-coat, top-hat, and nankeen trousers. It was the Police Sergeant. He wanted to know when the cases in the lock-up were going to be fed. This was an innovation, that had crept in ever since a vagabond had died on their hands the previous winter. Parmenter growled. He did not believe that the Sergeant was greatly concerned for the occupants of the three cells, and the common dungeon that lay below the Mumford tower. He thought that the guardian of the peace was after Ebby. Leaving the Sergeant to understand that he had in no wise forgotten his duties,

he followed the passage in the blackest darkness, and a smell that had taken centuries to develop, for a certain number of paces, known by habit, groped with his right hand, found a door, and went through.

He was now in his own, the Keeper's lodgings, situated in St. Catherine's Chapel. It consisted of two rooms only, lighted by grated windows in deep embrasures, before which danced, all daylight long, the legs and feet of the passers-by, in the street outside. The apartments were but two, stone cells of the plainest, remarkable only for the height and beauty of their groined and vaulted ceilings. One, plainly, had been the Chapel, as Mr. Varley had explained to his audience of admirers and followers, while Parmenter glared at the intrusion. The place occupied by the stove at which Parmenter's food was cooked was the altar. The other had originally been accessible only from the outside, and had been the abode of the anchorite, as witness the squint, from it to the other apartment. The connecting door, Mr. Varley had no difficulty in showing, was of later date.

To such a suite Parmenter returned. Here was Ebby patiently keeping warm his gruel. She started when he entered. Parmenter was not the sort of man to notice it, and Ebby started at everything. She had the round back, busily bobbing head and prominent frightened eye of a hen. She filled so tiny a corner of the corporate life of Easthampton that the current religious teaching as to the importance of the sparrow in the eye of God was amply necessary to explain her existence. She passed for

Parmenter's daughter, had grown up beside him in those two underground but holy cells he inhabited, ever since she or any one else could remember. None remembered her mother, she did not herself, and Parmenter, who presumably could have told, was more than usually silent on the subject. The child had grown up into the thin nervous woman, like all the real old town-bred, of surprising powers of endurance. Ebby was neither tall nor fat, healthy nor beautiful. Her face was pale and unsmiling, not without that symmetry to be seen on the faces of those who are never overfed, but who, by strong daily compulsion, have never time to sit and brood, to pity and assert themselves. She was hard as many a big well-grown pink-cheeked woman was not. Why Parmenter let that paid-off sailor fellow quarter himself upon the family, how Ebby was induced to go through some sort of ceremony she firmly believed to be that of Holy Matrimony with him, no one had ever discovered. He had not been greatly remarked, was not much to be seen or heard of until he, with others, was arrested for robbery with violence and sentenced to transportation. It was said he had escaped and was hiding. Whether this rumour had reached Ebby recently and worked upon her mind, or whether something really had occurred to frighten her, she was trembling as she put Parmenter's food before him. So much so that Parmenter noticed it, an unusual thing, for like every one else, he took Ebby as a matter of course.

"What's come to you?" he asked.

"I've seen him!" Ebby spoke in the low monotonous voice of those for whom inflection can add nothing to the import of what they have to say. Parmenter eyed her:

"Give me the bread for the lock-up!" he said.

Mechanically Ebby obeyed. She knew, of course, how many of the bolder or less fortunate of the town had been swept in off the street, the night before, cut from the loaf portions of the regular size, and filled a stone jug with water, from the larger stone jug standing in the corner, with which she had staggered in from the pump an hour before. She went on:

"The child was callin' him, and I looked, and there he was!"

She indicated with the wooden spoon with which she was stirring the pot, the little girl that had been born and christened Arethusa, the name of a ship in which the father was believed to have served. Ebby always spoke of the child as of some external circumstance that had happened to her. The little one sat by the stove on a little stool, supping from her wooden bowl, looking up with a twinkle of such profound worldly experience as sat oddly, rather dreadfully, on her infant face. Parmenter said:

"Another!" nodding at the portions of bread Ebby had cut. The effect of this was profound. Ebby's face blanched as may the face of one who, fearing to have been visited by an apparition, is confirmed in that fear. She stared, open-mouthed with terror at Parmenter, who took the knife, pocketed a further

lump of bread, and stumped off with the platter and jug. The Police Sergeant was waiting for him at the door that gave upon the steps and daylight.

"Come along!" he said gruffly, as he inspected the number of portions on the platter. "That's right!"

Together they skirted the building, re-entered under the Mumford tower, where another groined vault, scrupulously clean in barrack fashion, with sanded floor, white-washed wall, burnished arms and polished seats, accommodated half a dozen policemen. Through this, itself lighted by a lamp, swung from the vaulting, they entered after unlocking a door, a passage so dark that had they not been used to the routine, they could never have followed it, ending as it did in a spiral stair. This brought them, descending not only through darkness, but through thickening layers of a particular smell, to a stone passage faintly lit by gratings, showing a number of doors, and one at the end. As these were opened the stench became evidently that of humanity that, flung into confined space, had had some hours to sour, no ablution or ventilation. The Sergeant opened the door, Parmenter dumped a lump of bread, filled an unrinsed cup with water, returned to the passage, and the Sergeant locked up. There were five cells, at each one of which the routine was repeated. Only in one cell did the occupant show any signs of life. All the others, from drink, the stupefying atmosphere, deliberate intention, or inertia, lay on their benches, heads on arms. In that one the occupant sat bolt up-

right, glaring and defiant. It was the gipsy woman. Parmenter put down her portion and filled her cup, but she said not a word until the Sergeant, a pleasant-faced fellow of the sort who is always well with the ladies, remarked, "There's your breakfast!"

She however kept her eyes on Parmenter.

"You're hiding something!" she cried, prophetic, pointing at him. He never raised an eyelid.

"She's found you out. What are you a-hiding?" laughed the Sergeant, superior and incredulous. "That's the lot!" The cell door was closed and locked and the two regained the Police Station.

"You know what's for this morning?" the Sergeant asked. Parmenter nodded. "The nomination!" the other confirmed, never sure of Parmenter's nods. That was all.

The Keeper then found his way back again, outside and down the steps, but still he did not go to his lodgings. Unlocking a door to the left, he entered a corkscrew stair contrived in the thickness of the wall of the clock tower, and ascended this with even, unhurrying tread. As he wound up and up, loopholes gave ever more extensive views of the Market Place and surrounding streets. Dust lay thicker, then bird-droppings appeared, and above the pigeons could be heard scuffling. The wind whistled and the atmosphere was surprisingly different at some forty feet elevation. At the top, Parmenter unlocked a rough wooden door and entered a chamber which, from its cramped dimensions and domed top, could

only be the interior of the belfry. The whole eastern wall was occupied by the works of the clock, whose face was towards the Market Place. On a bench against the opposite wall was seated a man.

The face that was raised on Parmenter's entry was the same face that Ben the ostler had seen in the darkness of the carrier's room. In the comparatively clear light of the Moot Hall belfry, it could be better seen. It did not bear any longer the blank terror of the day before. It was one of those tough fleshy faces, all forehead, cheekbone and jaw, in which the small eyes, flattened nose and coarse gash-like mouth expressed very little, and that little an infantile belief in violence, in the right of the hardest hitter. Being hit extremely hard by the criminal system of England had daunted it for a few hours. A day's respite in hiding had already restored it.

Parmenter produced a lump of bread, and set down the jug of water. The man opposite seized both, and with alternate gulping mouthfuls, demolished the one and emptied the other, handing it back to Parmenter, who growled severely, but with the same non-chalant protecting class loyalty that Ben had shown:

"Don't you go spying on Ebby!"

The other was visited by a gleam of some solitary good instinct, and muttered something about the child. Parmenter silenced him.

"That'll give y' away, sure enough, if it sees y'!"

The other relapsed into wooden immobility. Parmenter took a big brass crank from a hook, put it in

position, and laboriously wound the clock. Turning without a word, he left his son-in-law alone, and descended the stair. Ebby was busy about the stove, the child played in the hearth. Parmenter finished his breakfast, and went along the passage to look at the lower court where the nomination would take place. It was not in the tradition of the time to dust such a place, but Parmenter, from some obscure gaol tradition that dated from the Plague, opened the hinged portion of two of the windows. In his mind this action was not association with ventilation, of which he had never heard, but with preventing the smell of the prisoners from reaching authority on the Bench. Persons presenting themselves for nomination for Parliament he classed in the same category.

To such an occasion did Mr. Statchard convey Theodore. They left the Rectory early in the hired carriage, after a breakfast specially prepared for them; the ladies were not called so early and Marina, hearing the sounds of preparation, by going into her mother's room in bedgown and mobcap was only able to catch a glimpse of two top hats, as the carriage rolled away. She looked longingly enough at one of those, but so small a part of man's destiny is love that her looking did not raise the hat, nor turn up to her the face beneath it. Even so, she had to explain to her mother who and what was astir, and to invent excuses for being there, all of which she found most irksome, gave it up, and fortified herself to wait.

The morning was cold, bright and still. At Mr. Statchard's bidding, the carriage made a detour by Eastwick and entered Easthampton from the north, in order to give an opportunity for Theodore's presentation to various people who, Mr. Statchard considered, were worth such attention. Theodore was totally unacquainted with this portion of the city, lying as it did along the river, beyond the Cathedral Close. The streets were narrow and old, the houses that lined them, early in date, with their timbered gables, covered with red tile or thatch. But what Theodore learned that morning was the extraordinary way in which the city was filling up. For behind the houses that lined the street had been originally a garden, or yard, and beyond that a stretch of green meadow only bounded by the city wall, or by the backs of similar yards or gardens of a neighbouring street. Now the new industrial developments were covering all this interspace with buildings, factories and workshops, and the squalid rows of tenement houses in which lived those who filled such places all day long. Here indeed was a new world, as far removed from the spacious houses and wide streets he knew — the Close and Bishopgate, Riverside and Prospect Place — as were the stunted figures and furtive looks now surrounding him from the dignified carriage and good-humoured faces of His Lordship or the Rector, the banker or Mr. Varley, Ramplingham or Allday. It would have taken more

than an unaccustomed atmosphere and a few black looks to daunt him that morning. The youth in his blood, whipped by the early departure and importance of his tour of the town, prepared him to undergo anything. The real election air made itself more manifest to-day. He had heard Mr. Statchard, as in a dream, stating that "The writ is down" without clearly imagining what sort of a thing it might be, much less how such a piece of news should travel over so considerable an area, to reach the ears of so many people. But that it was important news, and had, in fact, reached every nook and corner of all these alleys and by-ways was clear. People knew who he was, why he was being led around by Statchard, introduced with a flourish to so many people he had never seen before, and whose names he had such an effort to catch and recall, whose importance he was sometimes so far from rightly estimating. That he was now an object of great interest and some advantage was evident enough from his reception. He understood that, and it was almost the only thing that coincided with his preconceived lofty view of the status and responsibilities of a Member of Parliament. But who all these people might be, he was too young to be able to appreciate, and what their so pressing need to know him arose from, he was far too generous toward human nature, far too unversed in the machinery of the organisation of human congeries, to suspect. He endeavoured, as he bent to pass under low archways, or turned sideways to

thread narrow passages, to follow not only Mr. Statchard's steps, but his clipped and abbreviated indications as to which were freemen, which freeholders, and which occupiers, these apparently being the three divisions into which humanity, or some small part of it, had suddenly resolved itself.

For over an hour the round of visits continued. Passing from one street to another, from the brightness of the winter day to candle-lighted cellars in which men and women and children were bent over their benches or machines, to bar parlours, or prim little counting-houses, Theodore began to receive the impression of going round and round in a circle. In vain he smoothed his cheeks, sore with maintaining a continual smile. In vain he rubbed his eyes, strained with peering in rapid and complete changes of light, and straightened his hand, cramped and greasy from the quantity of promiscuous hands it had clasped. The numberless people, their half-heard names, their incomprehensible personalities, overloaded his faculties and stunned his attention. He was glad when Mr. Statchard, looking at the gleaming dial of his thick gold watch, bustled him into the carriage.

Sitting well back, he stretched his neck, rested his legs and sniffed the keen morning air. What a round it had been, like nothing in his actual experience, and in his reading only some portions of Milton and Dante. Now that he had escaped from all those confined places, and fresh contacts, he began to wonder more and more at the position he had come to occupy

in the minds of so many strangers. Cheers and booing followed the carriage.

"Pray, Mr. Statchard," he asked, "by what means have so many people become acquainted with me in so short a time? Every one seems to know who I am, and everywhere we seem to be expected."

"Ward Committees see to that!"

"Indeed. They must have performed some prodigious feats since yesterday!"

"They know their own men."

"They must have remarkable memories!"

"There are eight Wards and twelve Committeemen to each. Thus to cover the two thousand one hundred and sixty-three electors, no very extraordinary exertion was necessary."

"There are, of course, many considerations to be placed before the electors at such a time."

"No. Only one. How will they vote?"

"But that, surely, must depend upon convictions that rest upon a multitude of arguments!"

"It depends upon the Arts of Persuasion!"

"That is apparently much outside my province, as the only argument I have so far applied, is to shake the electors by the hand and inquire for their health. That is all there was opportunity for!"

"You may leave it to those who are accustomed to it."

And however much Theodore would have liked to pursue the subject, he was cut short by the arrival of the carriage at the Moot Hall.

Obediently he descended behind Mr. Statchard and entered the building by a set of broad and fair stone steps, and found himself in a vestibule from which radiated solid old staircases, wooden if they went up, stone if they went down. There was already a stir about the place, amongst liveried men whom he took for the lower officials of the Corporation, others of a very sharp self-confident variety whom he took, from their obsequiousness to Mr. Statchard, to be lawyers' clerks, and some who were, if not gentlemen, at least merchants of some position. A surly-faced man motioned them down some steps, and they descended to where a pair of handsome double-doors admitted to a largish chamber, sunk below the level of the street, decorated with the Royal Arms, some portraits, and a stand for regalia, and furnished with wooden divisions that partook of the nature of pews and also of cattle-pens. Against the farther wall was a dais with a chair of state, flanked by smaller ones.

The place was already half-full, and Mr. Statchard guided him to the right, where he was placed in the forefront of a group which contained his proposers, Ramplingham, Doughty, Allday, and the rest, while, separated as though at a wedding, Sir Curtius Hamilton could be seen, a few pews away, supported by a set of individuals whom he did not know, but who, from their general appearance, and the glances they bestowed, were evidently appraising and criticising the weight and composition of his party. These, in

their turn, were doing the same to those opposite, and between the two parties ran a wooden barrier and a less palpable hedge of the very best-mannered and good-humoured antagonism.

Both groups were continually being joined by individual adherents. Thus Mr. Varley came to stand close behind Theodore, and began to describe to him the history of the apartment in which they now stood, its associations with the Plague, the scenes that had been enacted in it during the arming of the Fencibles against the Young Pretender, and the festivities that had graced the visit of George the Third. Theodore's attention was, however, diverted by the opening of the door at the back of the dais, to admit two gentlemen in robes, which Mr. Varley whispered to him were the last surviving trace of the burgher gown, the wearers being none other than the Sheriffs. Behind them moved in an imposing procession the silver trident, the golden maces, officers and clerks. Now the trumpets blared, and the sour-faced man who held the trident sounded it upon the floor, demanding silence for the Sheriffs. The assembled parties drew themselves up and bowed, the Sheriffs returning the bow, and the clerk then read the writ and the Sheriffs asked for nomination of a fit and proper person to represent the city in the Commons House of Parliament.

At this moment an interruption occurred. The door behind the dais was thrown open again, and Lord Carstone entered, bowed to the Sheriffs, and

made his way to the Buff party, to the audible satisfaction of its members, and the no less obvious discomfiture of the Blue partisans. Shaking hands with Theodore and his foremost supporters, the nobleman lost no time in stepping forward to nominate Mr. Theodore Carston as candidate.

He had hardly ceased speaking before a suave and portly figure in black stepped from the Blue ranks, and with well-feigned choler, nominated Sir Curtius Hamilton. There followed a Buff, and then a Blue speaker, alternately, until all of each group had spoken, when silence was again called and the Sheriffs demanded a show of hands. The two parties proved to be exactly equal. The Blue party then demanded a poll, which was fixed to take place forthwith, and the ceremony was at an end. The members of each party chatted among themselves, there was a perfunctory motion of thanks to the Sheriffs, but the high state function was over. Theodore felt as though he had suddenly stepped into a draught. The formalities had delighted him. It was the first time since Lord Carstone had made known the wish that he should stand as candidate that things had gone as he felt they should go. The decorous speech and action of the well-dressed men, acting in concert upon lines dictated by use, fulfilled his vision of the almost senatorial dignity of elective choice. He was, however, soon snatched away from such satisfaction, snatched also from the low persuasive voice of Mr. Varley, begging his attention to the curious bosses

from which the vaulting of the chamber was sprung, by the dry peremptory directions of Mr. Statchard. The Blue party being nearest the door, filed out first, Mr. Statchard was close upon their heels, and signalled over their heads to the carriage, which drew up at the foot of the steps, directly that of Sir Curtius had moved away. As soon as he was out of the building Theodore realised how necessary this was. What had been within those thick walls a mere rumour, proved without to be the cheering and hooting, the cat-calling and yelling of a rough excited crowd.

A file of constables enabled him to gain the conveyance with one or two members of his party, the door was slammed, an attempt made to clear the way, but in fact the vigorous whipping-up of the horses was the only means by which they achieved a swaying erratic progress through the crowd, like that of a skiff in a choppy sea. Fortunately they had not far to go, the entrance to George Yard was their destination, and here the big gates could be closed behind them.

The interior of the inn had the appearance of a fortress being put in a state of siege. From her window Mrs. Armes saw everything and remarked upon it. "Here, Ben, see who that is, just come in by the tap!" and "Up there, you girls, have you got the long room ready for them commercial gents?" Ordinary travellers were being bestowed in the remoter corners of the building, which fortunately had

corners enough. The coffee-room table was perpetually set with cold fowls and boiled tongue, hams and game-pies, Cheddar and Stilton. There was ale on draught, porter in bottles, Madeira in decanters, cherry brandy. The dining-room was turned into an office where Vardigans presided over a score of fellow clerks, mixed with volunteers, among whom, most unexpectedly, Theodore noticed the grave face and silver hair of Mr. Allday, setting an example of humility and industry. Mr. Statchard left no time for mere curiosity, but urged him to eat and drink and took him out again, in the brisk afternoon, for a further round, by Ramplingham's tannery, the button factory of a Mr. Saint, along Riverside, among the watermen and bargees, and back by the corn merchants, the maltsters and the shops of a score of small tradesmen, butcher, baker, harness-makers, more than he could remember.

The crowd had thinned somewhat, but there remained an effervescence, a disposal to throw work aside and follow him and his supporters, with shouts of encouragement or disapproval. He found, as in the morning, that many a mind was made up and nothing he said or did would unmake it. The craftsmen and those of the rougher life, slaughterers, barge-owners, horse-knackers, were independent and apparently had to be convinced by whispered argument that Mr. Statchard or some ward henchman would draw them aside to propound. But the great number of human beings took what appeared to him a wholly

unwarrantable interest in him, one that could not depend on the vote they did not possess, the opinion they could not form, the personal gain or loss to themselves they could not influence. Now and again, in factory or workshop, some fiercely muttered word or look of impersonal hostility gave him a glimpse of unexplorable depths below the political surface that the wind of party, blowing now Blue, now Buff, stirred so violently, but to so shallow an extent. At the button factory a group of workpeople evidently had written some sort of petition on a scroll and desired to present it to him, but the proprietor intervened with angry words and gestures, and Mr. Statchard hurried him along. He asked what it was all about.

“What can it matter,” was the reply, “they have no franchise.”

At length, after the short dusk had drawn in, he was taken back to the George, and tired as he never could have been by a day's hunting or shooting, by any journey on horse or foot, he begged to be allowed to repose himself for an hour or so before dinner. Mr. Statchard seemed to hesitate, but at sight of the queue of messengers, clerks and supporters desiring answer, direction or hearing, the lawyer acceded to his request, and he was allowed to find his way to the room that had been reserved for him. Here he plunged his head into a basin of water, rubbed it dry, and only loosening his neckcloth, flung himself in

other respects fully dressed upon the bed. He could not have been asleep long before he was aroused by knocking at the door, where he found a maid, who tendered a dirty piece of paper upon which, by the light of the candle she carried, he was able to decipher the words informing him that the bearer desired a word with him at the door of the tap. "From the young lady at the Rectory" was scrawled below. With what a surge of glad emotion did not such a message burst upon his heart, daunted by the unaccustomed labours, the perplexing experiences of the day. To have a word, a thought from Marina, seemed to his half-awakened senses the very antidote that he needed to the fatigue and strain he was feeling. Yet caution restrained him from allowing a sign of what passed so quickly in his mind to appear before the probably inquisitive eyes of the domestic, to the possible discomfort of the being he held so dear, and desiring only to be lighted to the head of the stairs he dismissed the messenger. It was no difficult task to find his way to the appointed place, for all the main rooms of the house hummed with the labours of a crowd of workers in the cause, who were ascertaining and establishing the first results of the canvass, and no one had leisure to think of him while so intent upon his candidature. With what a delightful sense of alluring secrecy did he not tread the stairs, dodging a little behind baluster or door jamb, as Ramplingham crossed the passage beneath him self-

importantly, or Statchard's dry authoritative voice broke upon his ear, cutting through the din with brief, sarcastic comment or command. Out into the half-dark of the yard he hurried, reached the appointed place, and suddenly, in that dark entry, knew nothing more.

VI

Bye-Ways

THE same dusk that descended on the George Inn seemed to come more slowly to the open country. While the fitful but numerous lamps of the town made it appear that night had fallen there, enough light remained in the fields to render visible any person who might have followed the path that ran below the hedge of the upper garden of the Rectory at Hoake, and joined the road not far from the gate by the stable weather-vane. This perhaps was why little Warman, the maid, found it worth while to slip out at that hour, on the pretext of some washing left to dry, and to peer over the palings, between the bare branches of the shrubs that lined them, across the empty landscape. Her little face, not unattractive by reason of its pink smoothness, and direct child-like glance of grey eyes, was spoiled by the receding and pendulous lower jaw, and lack of proportion in the diminished forehead and crown, as of a child that would never grow up. Nor could she count upon any allurements of expression, for that which dominated her features was compounded of a mixture of curiosity, greed and small vanity, and controlled by apprehension of the worldly powers to which she was subjected all day, and superstition as to those which, according to her inherited belief, would pursue her throughout eternity.

Now the prompting had been irresistible, to such as she. Only the day before, at this very hour, she had been engaged on one of her many and continuous small tasks, at that very spot, when she had been electrified by a low, soft whistle. Looking up, she saw but a man's face, the chin resting on the palings, the hat brushing the twigs above.

Had she been either older or younger, she might have screamed at the possibilities associated, by use or by ignorance, in her mind with strange men. Had she been a lady she might have bidden him sternly begone. But being, as she was, little Warman, the maid, she was at that exact stage and condition at which strange men were the one possible outlet for such of her faculties as were not already blunted and subdued to the meticulous routine of a fifteen-hour day. She had already learned, and had she not learned, she had been abundantly informed, that her place in life was at the bottom, usefulness and thankfulness her lot. She was, in fact, so consciously at the bottom that she retained a certain rudimentary sense and initiative. Of healthy instincts, and born and reared among animals, esteeming herself, moreover, not ill-looking — though she would never have dreamed of putting herself in the same category as the beautiful young lady, Miss Marina, whose clothes she was occasionally allowed to mend or tend — she had long discovered that she had something to bargain with. Though the bargain that she would eventually contract was called marriage, and must be

soon so as not to be too late, she had a perfect appreciation of the fact that until she made it she might be in the advantageous position she described to herself as "bein' courted."

So she stood, arrested, her hands above her head, upon the garment she was about to remove from the line, that head turned upon her shoulder, subconscious perhaps that thus her young figure appeared to advantage, and not in the least discommoded by a clothes-peg in her mouth, for she had no desire to commit herself to speech, but merely to discover what advances he might be prepared to make, according to the rules of society below stairs, as she knew them.

The man at the fence was a stranger. She knew all the village by sight, and it was not likely either that any inhabitant would care or dare to approach the Rectory by such an avenue. This added to the stranger's possibilities. And then his mouth, which had been pursed to whistle, relaxed into a grin, and he made that chirping sound that has persuaded untold generations of horses. Little Warman understood that. Addressed to her, it meant a desire for dalliance. She proceeded, according to the well-known usage, completely to unpin the garment she was holding, fold and drop it in her basket, then to remove the peg from her mouth, and turn her head with a provocative: "Goo on with yer!"

It was now for him to elaborate. His object must be to diminish the distance between them, for "courtin'" could not properly be conducted over a

dozen yards of cold winter dusk. Propinquity was its essence and its test. Warman did not look as she unpinned the next garment to see if he was getting over the fence; it was his move. Though she listened, she perceived no movement. Nor did she hear speech. Instead, there was a crunching sound. She looked. His jaws were working behind the grin, in his hand he held something out. That was sufficient. Lifting her basket on to her hip, Warman came as far as the path that ran from the drying-green to the house, and demanded:

"Whatcher got there?"

"Come and see!" The voice was neither that of a gentleman nor a yokel, and he knew the game. Without further hesitation Warman set down her basket and hopped over the flower border, and pushed between the shrubs. The substance that he was proffering was barley-sugar.

"Ooo-h!"

"Like a bit?" Warman nodded, scrubbed her damp corrugated fingers on her gown, and taking the shining sweet stuff, twirled it between wide red lips, taking stock of the giver. His appearance was reassuring, he had to do with horses, by his breeches and gaiters, but was of her status, evidently in service. A faint jingle from a dark shadow below the bank, growing formless in the twilight, told her he had a horse tethered. Warman's minutes of relaxation were not numerous, and she made the best of them, sucking hard and smiling with her eyes at the swain.

"Sweet?" he asked.

"Um-shp!"

"Mine's sweeter!" She removed her bit, as if for comparison, and he deftly kissed her, where her lower lip shone faintly with stickiness. "Ain't it?" he asked.

Little Warman understood that, half expected it. She began her bubbling giggle, but did not forget to swing him a good clout, at the full length of her arm. Nor did he take offence, used as she to the niceties of behaviour that the situation demanded. He was preparing to renew the salute, but she was the more surprised of the two. Even in the dusk, the head she had so brusquely uncovered glowed red.

"Lor'!" she remarked, "copper nob."

He was about to demand satisfaction for this pleantry, when suddenly his face took on an alert expression, and he dropped all but his eyes below the level of the fence. Warman turned. He had not been deceived, footsteps sounded upon the gravel of the garden walk. Perfectly still and silent the two by the fence watched between twig and stem, as Marina paced moodily along; almost heard her sigh as she turned across the top of the drying-green and saw before her the harbour, then slowly and mournfully, but with that unmistakable presence that Warman had heard the Jordans attribute to having been brought up in foreign parts, return languidly to the house.

Warman's emotions were chiefly concerned with

not having been seen. Her admirer, however, was inquisitive.

"Who's she?"

"Master's niece. A beautiful young lady!"

"Lives with you?"

"Ever since I bin here!"

"Any young men about the place?"

"What d'you want to know for?" It was not so much that Warman resented the question as that she regretted that the subject of the conversation wandered.

"Thought they might be kind to a young maid like you?"

"Then you've thought a lie," she returned roundly, not at all shocked. "'Tain't likely, with her about!"

After that the conversation had reverted to her favourite subject, and had even become quite interesting, when it had been interrupted by a long-drawn "Wa-arman!" from a patch of light created, she knew, by the opening of the scullery door, while she had no doubt that the tones were those of Mrs. Jordan.

With a hurried promise to meet again, the following night, she had gone about her business with her basket. But later on, in her garret, having cleared away, washed up, swept out, darned and mended, carried in coals and wood, drawn water, turned down beds, set candles in their places, and finally been dismissed, she had sat on the edge of her bed, in her coarse but clean shift, and swiftly, for she was held

accountable for any undue shortening of her bit of candle, and her uncurtained window threw a beam of light far up the garden, disentangled her bit of barley-sugar from the hem of her bodice into which she had tucked it. Then, getting herself between the scanty bed-clothes, with much creaking of the old bedstead and straw mattress, she had sat in the dark, her chin on her bare knees, passing her rough hands over her limbs that ached with hard work, slowly savouring the dissolving sweet, and its mental equivalent, the memory of kisses given and taken, of her brief intimacy with a man who was neither a boy nor a rustic, but so much more adept and daring, thinking over the future possibilities of him, or rather feeling that he was a treat in store, but soon stretching herself to well-earned, dreamless, imperious sleep.

Thus, the following evening found her at the place and hour at which she expected renewed "courtin'," and when, as the minutes slid away, she found herself alone in the grey shadows and dreary moaning of the wind, she was not so much offended, for she had a deep instinct that the vague future lay before her, with bargaining powers unimpaired. She was a prey to quite other fears, common to all country people, to whom the hours of darkness were invested with crude actual danger to soul and body, with which, in her case, was mixed that sort of bad conscience that told her she was neglecting her duties. Soon she half-hopped, half-jumped back to the path, and made off at her peculiar gait, to the kitchen, arriving breath-

less, and blinking in the light. And her worst apprehensions were justified. The Jordans were both standing, idle, and discussing the affairs of their betters. Mrs. Jordan turned on her, with the domineering eternal suspicion of a good and superior servant, toward an inferior.

"Where've yew bin, bad girl?"

"Noowhere, jes' up th' garden!"

"Don't tell them lies! — " Jordan broke in.

"Looks as tho' she've seen the Devil!"

"I ain't. I ain't seen no one!"

"'Spect me to tell the master that!"

"O Lor'," cried the frightened girl, "whatever shall a' do!"

"Do? Get on with y' wark," she was commanded, and did so, the prey of terrible and growing foreboding.

Nor was her crude, village instinct deceived. In the wild darkness that lay empty of her phantom lover, other work was afoot, that dared not be done by light of day. At the very moment that she shivered in the Jordan's kitchen another woman shivered with the same premonition. This was Ebby, in her consecrated cellar under the Moot Hall, who, seeing Parmenter rise from his meal and go out into the impenetrable blackness of the passage, rose from her stool by the side of the fire, and hurried after him, at her stooping trot. Without possibility of sight, she could feel him stop and turn upon her with his exclamation, the animal snarl, "Go back!"

"I want t' see 'im!"

"You —— !" Parmenter was not accustomed to such determination from this quarter.

"I'm a 'spectable married woman!" Ebby tried to deepen and lend importance to her voice, that she could not impart by any gesture in the pitchy dark. Perhaps it was as well. Parmenter's teeth could be heard grinding. She could feel him groping. Then her wrist was seized, the door opened, and she was flung back into the dwelling with such violence that she fell over her own stool, and all but rolled into the fire. The clatter she made and the shrieks of the child drowned every other sound for a few moments, but by the time that Ebby had comforted the little one, her towncraft, strong as any woodcraft, told her that Parmenter had gone up the stair and not outside the building. She was as agitated as any hen, fluttered about the cramped apartment in which she was confined, her throat working, her eyes protruding and gleaming. In her narrow, inarticulate life, the marriage of which the world had known so little was so important, that it was nearly everything. Now, assured by strong if stunted instinct that her man, her sailor, with whom her conjugal life had been so short as never to have ceased to be a romance, was near, but withheld from her, she became a prey to feelings stronger than ever visit more complete natures. Conscious enough in her way, that her life was set about with narrow limits, though probably unable to define, much less attempt to break

through them, her married state appeared to her as her one possible claim to be considered as a human being. But how was she to assert herself? Parmenter had turned the key in the lock, and the solid old door resisted any attempt that a dozen such as she might have made to move it. Not so much in hope of escape from this imprisonment, as from a mere necessity to do something to overcome the irksomeness of those four walls, and low vaulting, she clambered up into the embrasure of the window. Clinging to the stout bars, she peered out into the gathering dusk, most deceptive of all lights, and confused from her standpoint by the fitful murky light of lamp and candle, dispersed in all sorts of directions at the arbitrary will of individuals, and rendered additionally strange by the fact that the top of the window recess was some eighteen inches above the cobbles of the streets. If she had any clear plan in her head, it was to assuage her feelings by a sight of him whom her father was, she felt sure, spiriting away, for those dumb reasons of his own that formed the basis of all his actions. But although from her position she should have been able to see the legs of any persons issuing from the Moot Hall from its main entrance, the steps of which descended to the level of the street, not many feet from her coign of vantage, nothing passed before her eyes, and had it not been that her position was so cramped that it was physically uncomfortable, and obliged her to change her position, she might never have noticed, as she now did, what

struck her mind, straightly enclosed by habit, as abnormal.

There existed in those days, on the westward end of the Moot Hall that faced Cockle Row, a sort of yard or green, surrounded by a stout spiked railing, that had been in an earlier age the site of the gallows, and formed now a small waste plot into which Parmenter swept such rubbish as he ever did sweep, and let it lie there. The gate in the railings of this was just being undone by a person whose nether garments she had no difficulty in recognising as Parmenter's. Deeply intrigued, she now clung staring in this direction. Parmenter had re-entered the building. To any one else this might have seemed ordinary enough, but to one of Ebby's minute day-to-day knowledge of the place, it was startling and sinister. Parmenter never went to the green unless he was obliged, the gate in the railings had not been undone for decades, witness the sour screech of the key in the lock. There was the police entrance on the Mumford side for any business that he did not deem fit for the main entrance. But what was more remarkable was the turning in at that gate of two pairs of legs, one in gaiters, one in trousers and one pair of small thin wheels. To Ebby this was sufficient. A man connected with horses and a man connected with the lower industrial world of the city, had pushed into the enclosure one of those small narrow trolleys the weavers used for the fetching and carrying of their trade, or had done so until the distress of the last

few years had left to them little enough to fetch or carry. Certainly this vehicle had no imaginable right in Moot Hall.

At the same hour that two women waited in such dire suspense, a man, unknown to either, shared their emotion. Far from the Moot Hall, farther still from the Rectory of Hoake, in one of the narrow, overhung streets of the ancient quarters of East-hampton, a man sat bent over a book. Already the gathering shadows forbade him to decipher the words of the crabbed print, but that mattered less to him than to many, firstly because he knew the words by heart, and secondly, because, as he would have said, the Spirit gave him light. The book before him was the Bible. It was open at the Psalms, and like sparks blown from the chimney of a smithy, there whirled up from his heart through his brain, little points of light, brilliant against smoky blackness. Each of these tiny illuminations was vocative to him in good Jacobean English, flashing at him the great truths that had been written down, of old, but for all eternity, concerning him and his personal fate. Thus being hungry and in despair, because the great loom that mounted in the darkness of his tile-floored, plaster-walled room, was idle and empty, and the sale of all those materials he had been used to make and sell for many years, had gone north-west to places at which machines could work faster than he, though never so well, he fed and warmed himself with the Old Testament. Nor were his feelings abated by the

fact that this very fate had been prophesied to him time and again by persons more widely informed than himself, and had been disbelieved as long as the local market had remained untouched by the old methods of locomotion. Now that, with advancing progress, his fate was upon him, he had one resource left, that book which was at once the only one he had ever read or ever desired to read, and in its blunt, highly-coloured rhapsodies of his favourite section of it, he found a warmth that numbed his chilled limbs, a substance that filled his empty belly, a justification which enabled him to rise above the destiny he could not mould. Behind rather than before his eyes scintillated and swam the texts, and perchance commentators' interpolated notes, bits of ritual or hygienic by-laws and even single words, all transmuted by faith into that which he desired them to be. Thus he was confirmed in his belief that all mankind was leagued in a great conspiracy against him because he was a just and upright man, hard-working and abstemious; the motive of the conspiracy was jealousy of the preference which the supreme Lord of the Universe, one higher than any landlord, dignitary of church or state, higher than Royalty even, was bound to have for him. It was necessary that he should endure to the uttermost, so that at the last moment, the conspirators, who were the human race, should suddenly be confounded; he knew; he could see leering, taunting faces suddenly change their expression to one of abject fear and hopeless entreaty

as the Lord, his Lord, flung them down to permanently excruciating torture for ever and ever, and snatched him, him alone, up into an eternal blessedness that should transcend anything he could relate to a physical sensation, but which he dimly felt to be righteous revenge. He was conscious enough of daily reality peeping through all this. For the political excitement of the week he felt nothing but contempt, not connecting such happenings with his economic state, nor imagining that they could affect him, for his rent did not reach the figure necessary to qualify him for a vote. Even had it done so, it is by no means sure that he would have taken such a privilege except at its market valuation. His horizon was bounded by his loom. When that stood idle, he could imagine no other earthly life, and transferred being to another plane. This was easier than might be imagined, because, spending almost all his waking hours in the narrow court, he saw little or nothing all the week save the few persons who were his neighbours, or with whom he traded, while on Sundays, he spent hours on the other side of the court where a cottage had been converted into a primitive meeting-house, as was shown by the word **ZION** roughly carved on four stones inserted in the brickwork over the door. Here he had ample opportunity to pray, and not infrequently to preach. It had been then something in the nature of an incursion, when a fellow in breeches and gaiters had come knocking at his door demanding to hire the trolley on which he

trundled his materials from the warehouses at which he bought them, to his loom, and trundled away his finished article to the shops that sold them.

This fellow had worn a blue favour, spoken him fairly, and offered silver that no workless weaver could refuse. The reason for such a demand had been likely enough, and all in tune with his settled view of the world outside his court. All those who mingled in politics were necessarily sons of Belial, mistaking the shadow for the substance, and missing the straight and narrow path. He could have described exactly in words not his own, but very properly supplied to him in Holy Writ by Almighty God who had had them set down for the use of such elect as he, the exact fate of those crowds, whose tumultuous uproar vaguely reached him from the Market Place, whose vain ungodly comings and goings resounded in the street just outside his walk in life. Just because this was so, he had not allowed the matter to disturb his broodings upon higher things. Clearly these foredoomed ones were all the better relieved of the coin which they had received as the price of eternal damnation, and he had no scruple, being a just man, in agreeing to trundle his trolley to fetch away from scenes of worldliness and sin those who had succumbed to the whoredoms of strong drink, as he had been required to do.

When, therefore, the same step echoed uncertainly in the twilit place, and a knock rattled his door, he rose, and opened, and drew out his narrow trolley and

pushed it without further commerce with the vain man, in whose wake he shortly arrived, by inconspicuous bye-ways, at the little-used back of the Moot Hall. Here was the surly janitor whom he knew by sight, who, with the help of his guide, hoisted on to the trolley a burden which was unmistakably a human being in a state of coma. The clothes were outlandish, but the weaver was not inclined to discriminate between the children of Ammon, and pushed with an honest sense of giving the service for which he was to be paid. Nor did he complain of the circuitous route by which he was led completely round the Market Place, but never across it, and finally into the narrow lane, known as Middens Alley between the back of the George and the Bank property that fronted Bishopgate. Here was the George tap, and here, to his gratification the sum of his hire was handed to him, and he was bidden to refresh himself with a glass of stout in the candle-lit tap, deserted at that hour, for the interest of all was in the open Market Place.

When he emerged, emboldened by stout, his trolley still stood in the unlighted entry. Two persons were making a fresh disposition of its burden. Of one of these, he lost sight, and with regard to the other, who assisted him to push the trolley, he made no remark until, by the light of a window before which they passed, he observed that his guide had changed. No longer was he being led by a man of over middle height, in gaiters and top hat, his new

companion was of stocky build, walked with a roll, and had those very outlandish clothes, as of one whose employment lay along the waterside. And, used as only a hand-craftsman can be, to the actual feel and touch of the object with which he is in constant contact, he noticed that the trolley was differently balanced. The same recumbent figure lay along its narrow flat, but, by such intermittent light that fell upon it from window or bracket, he saw that it could not be the same as that with which he had started from the Moot Hall. It was no concern of his, he had been paid, and he included the man who had hired the barrow, the one who now pushed it beside him, and the one who lay upon it, in one comprehensive anathema. And before he formulated question or surmise, the party reached one of the low causeways that led between the merchants' houses of Riverside to the towpath. Stopping abruptly where the dark greasy water lapped the piles a few inches below their feet, the other twisted the trolley parallel to the bank, stooped and followed with his hand a painter attached to a clinking ring, brought against the quay edge a small dinghy, and motioned to him to lower the burden into it. This being done with some difficulty, the new guide leapt aboard, sent the boat shooting out into mid-stream with a dexterity that bespoke use, and speedily concealed it among the craft moored at some little distance from the shore. The weaver stood patiently for some moments, gazing into the confused shadows

of the lightless stream. Then, as nothing happened, and as his bargain ceased with the conveyance of the burden to its apparent destination, he turned his trolley cityward to the more frequented streets, but leaving it outside the bakehouse in Priory Loke, that led out of Dog Lane, while he refreshed himself with a basin of boiled tripe, and then went home, more fortified than ever in his certainty of predestination, that could by no possible means be the same for him, and for all these others.

VII

The Barge

THE next impression Theodore received was of darkness, nausea, and a queer motion that seemed to be carrying him onward, but how or whither he was too bewildered to determine. The only experience to which he could compare his present feelings was the occasion upon which he had drunk more than enough, a unique one, as he enjoyed life too much to curtail it by excess. He slept again and waked, and was finally roused not by curiosity, but by the extreme cold that caused him to shiver. Groping, he put out his hand, and found himself to be lying upon a pile of sacking, in a narrow place lined, so far as he could judge, with wood. About him was a smell of tar, a damp weedy smell, and a smell of grain, but the thing which caused him most alarm was the rattling, rustling and creaking that accompanied the swaying progress of his pitchy prison. Just as this prison shook and swayed and rushed onward with him, so did his disordered faculties agitate within his brain. Who was he? The question presented itself to him, and for long he could only have answered that he was a creature of human feelings. Gradually the touch of his clothes aided him to recall his name; Theodore Carston wore that high-collared coat, he knew. But the fact that he was

Theodore Carston aided him but little, for what was Theodore Carston doing in this place? He seemed to be in some cave of the winds, some cavern of the underworld or of space. He was closely confined, for on attempting to stand, he found that there was not height sufficient by nearly a third of his stature; and then, as he clung, uneasily stooping, the pressure of his shoulder made something lift, a glimmer of light appeared, a yet colder draught blew down his neck, refreshing and reassuring him. Twisting and shoving, he lifted a square hatch cover with his back, laid it aside, and looked out.

At first he had a deep misgiving that entire creation was whirling past him, but a glance upward revealed the unmistakable shapes of mast and lug-sail. He was in the forepeak of a barge, bowling along the river before the wind, at a smart pace. Upon the banks that fled by he was able to distinguish here a tree, presently a windmill. Ahead, the darkness was tinged with uncertain grey he took to be the dawn. For some minutes he stared about him, but youth, the reviving influence of the keen breeze, and the conclusion that there was nothing supernatural in his position, that he was upon solid earth, or rather water, and that some human being must be steering the boat, caused him to look more keenly. He soon assured himself of his foothold, raised himself through the hatch and clambered along the gangway that ran above the water each side of the capacious hold, until he could see round the black bulk of the sail.

When he could do so, he stopped dead, holding on by the stay, and staring. All his worst fears returned, partly from faintness, but largely from the sight that was presented to him. On the stern of the barge crouched a figure like that of some great toad. The light was as yet too feeble to give more than an outline, and a warm reddish glow that lit the object from the base upward, left the top, which narrowed to what might be presumed to be its head, in shadow. No features were visible, no movement other than that of the boat, no sign came from it. Theodore's first impulse was to jump into the dark water that swirled past. But a stronger determination gripped him, something he had been born with, and that he had cultivated at cricket, in bouts of fisticuffs, with every fence at which he had ever set a horse. Mastering the trembling of his knees and the aching of his head, he clenched his hands and advanced along the gangway. He came, in a few strides, to the well, six feet only separated him from the apparition, when the latter, after a preliminary rumble, turned and spat over the side in the most human fashion possible. The revulsion in Theodore's feelings was so great and sudden that he dropped exhausted and throbbing into the well, and might have fainted, had not misery, cold and hunger, acting upon healthy youth, brought him to a sense of the realities. Here was he, Theodore Carston, gentleman, candidate for Parliament, cast away upon a dirty barge in the middle of the night, or past it; with hot indignation

he cried to what was now clearly enough a bargee, leaning on the tiller:

“Here, you, put me ashore, at once!”

A broad grin split the heavy face from ear to ear. No reply came, and an even more childish instinct wrung from Theodore in a tone not far removed from a wail, the cry:

“Lord, I’m so devilish hungry!”

As if in answer to those words, there assailed his nose a most heavenly aroma, his ears a hissing, crackling sound, his shoulders a glorious warmth, while from behind him, there shot, illuminating the man at the tiller, a redoubled red glow, that fought against the dreary light of morning.

Turning sharply, he found that the half-door of the cuddy had been opened and another head had been thrust out to regard him, with big bold eyes, in which a humorous compassion softened the hard simplicity. For all its uncouth roughness and almost tarry weather-beaten texture, it was evidently that of a woman, from the coarse hair that straggled in thick locks from under a handkerchief tied beneath the chin. From the bargee came a growl of remonstrance, but the woman, quite fearless, motioned Theodore towards her, made room for him to squeeze upon a bunk covered by a rough blanket, and confined by a swinging board, before the stove. A great wooden bowl containing fat pork and big hard onions stood there; a lump of bread coarse and dull-coloured as a piece of wood was thrust into his hand. The first

was too hot for his grabbing fingers, the second too hard and dry for his parched mouth, but a tin pannikin of fiery spirit soon eased his jaws and he ate so eagerly that he did not notice that he was alone until he heard an altercation outside in the well, that the woman concluded with:

"For shame, Jasper, 'tis only a lad!"

The bargee slung his bulk upon the opposite thwart, without further parley, while the woman held the tiller, and the two disputed only the contents of the bowl, until it was too clean to need washing, and was hooked up in its place.

Theodore's spirits soon revived, but so did his sense of the impossible situation in which he now found himself. His head was still sore, but his faculties were sufficiently restored to enable him to appreciate the state of mind in which the leaders of the Buff party would find themselves, on seeking him in the morning; even more heavily weighed on him the fear that Marina would learn of his disappearance and grieve, though her grief had for him a deep satisfaction. He therefore began to question the bargee, who treated him as non-existent while they munched opposite each other.

"Where are you taking me?"

"Yew wait, an' yew'll see!" came the answer in the broad dialect of Easthampton.

"Whose orders are you obeying?"

"Doant yew arst no questions, an' yew woant be tole no lies!"

"You'll find there's a law against holding a person prisoner against his will. I demand to be set at liberty!"

The bargee eyed him squarely.

"Yew'll find there's a law again' trespass. You come aboard my boat, and stow away in my forepeak. A nice jib yew'll cut afore the Bench!" The sentence was finished half-way outside the cuddy as the bargee heaved his bulk into the well, and took the tiller from the woman. Its finality was so infuriating that Theodore caught hold of the nearest implement, which chanced to be a mop-handle, and with it levelled at his captor's head a blow, that would have certainly split the weapon, whatever effect it had produced on its mark, which so strongly resembled one of the knobs that surmounted the occasional mooring-posts of the river bank. But the blow never got so far, for the woman caught the descending stick with ease in one hand, while with the other she gave Theodore a push that sent him crashing back into the cuddy. He was up in an instant, but found himself powerless in her grip, was forced upon the bunk and held in spite of his struggles, and as if to add to the indignity, heard a deep chuckle escape the two. Worse than all, was to listen to her addressing him as "My lamb!" and adjuring him to "Kiss and be friends."

"Let me go!" he yelled, but his voice was silenced, to his horror, by two wide red lips, that imprinted upon his face a salute so warm and forceful, so

flavoured with rum and tar, that suffocation caused his limbs to relax, and he lay back upon the lair, his eyes closed, beaten.

A dozen projects rushed through his brain — to jump into the river and swim for it, to seize a knife from the hooks and cut a halyard, to try once more his strength, which to that moment had never failed him in any encounter against his adversaries. Before he could choose, the woman was back with a wooden bucket on a bit of rope, by which she had filled it, and now set it before him, bidding him kindly enough to “wash hisself like a Christian!” He might have refused had not the flavour of that awful caress so nauseated him, and accordingly he did as he was bid, and relapsed into gloomy meditations.

How long he remained so, left alone, he had no means of counting, but the next thing of which he was aware was a loud hail, answered from some distance, followed by a jest, the point of which he failed to catch, so broad was the dialect. It was received with titanic laughter, succeeded, after a short interval, by the sound of hammers, by splashing and a noise of ropes hauled through blocks, and of canvas flapping. Raising his glance to one of the tiny ports contrived in the combing of the cuddy, he was able to make out that the barge was approaching a town. The meadows that lined the banks gave way to towpath and yards, sheds and buildings lay beyond, while the river was occupied by craft of all draughts and rig. Rest and reflection were now working to calm his

temper and steady his mind. The scene was animated and interesting. He half lost consciousness of the wrong that had been done him, the affront he had suffered, and his uncertain fate, in gazing at the barges and lighters, the sailing ships, and row-boats that plied their trade, or drifted down upon the tide. For some long period he watched all that waterside life, and it was only at length that he perceived a change in the motion of the barge, heard sounds of activity upon the deck above him, and finally noticed that the shores, instead of slipping by, were turning round the barge. At first he was inclined to rush out and shout to any or every person within hearing to rescue him, but caution restrained him, the remembrance of ignominy and helplessness, reinforced by the sense that, however comforting it might be to see about him the civilised sights of a town which he judged to be Seaton, the inhabitants might look askance at his cravatless neck, stained clothes and tousled hair, disadvantages he had no means of overcoming. He remained at his spy-hole, therefore, while the operation of mooring was in progress, a matter he had much difficulty in judging, and it was not until he could hear no further sounds without, that he thought it prudent to go to the bargee and his wife, and ask them with the best grace he could muster, to take him ashore and direct him to Mr. Doughty, the banker's, the only house in the port at which he could hope to make himself known. What was his astonishment, on coming on deck, to see the

bargee and the woman, already many yards away in the dinghy, he rowing and she seated in the stern, her market basket on her arm. He shouted after them, and dimly across the water, the breeze brought him a surly injunction to "Keep still." He stamped up and down the deck in fury, watched the dinghy moored at some steps at the side of a slip-way, and stared round him for other help. There were men at work in the yard, and with much shouting he induced them to turn their heads. The bargee had had a word with them, and after a gaping stare, they resumed their work. At length he spied a waterman, pulling laboriously upstream, and bound to pass within a short distance. This man he hailed, and asked civilly if he might be put ashore. The waterman eyed him, and demanded, "Where's your money?"

Where indeed! Theodore plunged his hands into his pockets, but he knew all too well they were empty. He might, in fact, have been obliged to wait the return of the bargee, and possible liberation by him, had it not happened just then that a big three-masted ship came gliding in under shortened sail, hove to, and anchored. As Theodore surveyed her, engrossed by the manœuvre, a boat was lowered from her counter, seamen dropped into it, and a fine authoritative-looking man swung himself down by the chains, and seated himself in the stern. The oars bent, and the boat shot forward in the direction of the nearest landing. As it passed not many yards from the barge, Theodore hailed it and begged

politely to be put ashore. At a word, the boat was alongside, and Theodore seated beside the Captain. It was almost unnecessary for the latter to ask:

“Well, young sir, and what might you be doing on such a craft, in such a state?” coupled with a quizzical look at Theodore’s hatless head, bare neck and stockinged feet, in order to show what sort of a reception he might expect. He hastened to ask if Mr. Doughty had not a Banking Office in the port, and to desire that he might be directed thither. This seemed to raise him a little in his benefactor’s opinion, without spoiling the joke that he saw, from the discreetly veiled amusement of the Captain’s expression and the wooden impersonal grin of the oarsmen, his story was providing. No sooner ashore, than he was led by various narrow passages, smelling of wood and ropes, and the sea, to a wide street, in which were several substantial houses, built largely of wood, and with such ornaments as big glass lanterns and weather-vanes, as though the builders were nautical-minded. In one of these Mr. Doughty’s office was situated, and although the clerks who peered from port-hole-like openings, or round partitions that resembled bulk-heads, seemed to share the Captain’s enjoyment of Theodore’s predicament, yet they answered the authoritative inquiries, by conducting the pair into a well-furnished parlour, where they were soon joined by Theodore’s banker friend, and the Captain took his leave. After expressing much concern, Mr. Doughty conducted Theodore up into the

house, over the Bank, and here there was placed at his disposal a bedroom, means of washing and a change of clothes. Having made himself presentable, Theodore descended to a well-furnished dining-room, in which the banker brothers bade him join them at their early dinner. Mr. John Doughty was even more alarmed than Mr. Joseph by what had happened, and both made the kindest effort to put Theodore at his ease. This they speedily did, and by the time that a carriage had been ordered, he had little trace left of his adventure, save a shockingly sore spot on his head where the hat of Mr. Doughty's lending lay upon the bruise that showed so clearly that he had been stunned by some heavy object. Mr. Joseph Doughty accompanied him as far as the landing at which he had set foot, to see the barge upon which he had been "cooped" — such was the expression that all who heard of it used to describe his captivity. But it had already disappeared, and there was nothing for it but to make his way to Easthampton without identifying his captor. Mr. Doughty excused himself on the grounds of business, as it was his day at Seaton, and Theodore set out alone in the carriage.

The day, which had been grey and threatening, now became overcast. As the carriage left the streets and came out upon the open road, the first drops of rain began to fall. Just here was a toll-gate, and his conveyance stopped in order that the tax might be paid. The gate-keeper, with some show of reluctance, went on to say:

“And might I beg a favour of you, sir?”

“What is it?”

“Here is a lady that was going to Easthampton. Her chaise has broke the axle, and she has no time to wait while it is repaired. ’Tis a smith’s job, and a long one. She has an appointment to keep, and would ask if you could give her a lift, at least until she can obtain other means of travelling?”

Theodore felt the request to be strange, but the thought of the predicament from which he himself had so recently been rescued, together with other feelings, gallant curiosity, perhaps, and the sight of a muffled but respectable figure, of a certain stylishness, persuaded him to acquiesce. The gate-keeper thanked him and led the lady forward. She mounted with a nimbleness that argued youth and health, displaying for an instant an ankle modelled rather upon the ripe perfection of Juno, than upon the virgin promise of Diana, and took her place in the far corner of the seat. The door was closed, the horses whipped up, and the carriage laboured against the rain-laden wind. Theodore hastened to sympathise with the anxiety that the mishap must have caused her. In reply, there came only an indistinct murmur from the recesses of the veil. He could not catch a word and continued:

“I trust that you did not suffer any bodily harm?”

“No, I thank you!”

There was a deep note about the sound of the vowel, that Theodore could only connect with some

strong emotion. Could she be frightened, or perhaps apprehensive of so great a propinquity with a stranger of the opposite sex? With the object of reassuring her, and distracting her from her own misfortunes, he began to recount his, beginning with fatigue of the previous day.

"You can hardly picture to yourself, madam, how tiring a political contest can be. I can assure you that, by six in the evening, I was more worn out than if I had journeyed from Seaton on foot."

"I can well believe it!" sighed the lady.

"But on being apprised by one of the maids at the Inn that she had something to say to me, I followed her to the dark backway of the yard, and lost consciousness —— !"

Here he interrupted his story, becoming aware that his relation was causing his auditors an emotion he had not intended. She seemed to be trembling violently and her respiration was more rapid; he hastened to add:

"—— but I fear that I am distressing you. Can it be that you have been the victim of such a deception?"

For answer, his companion raised two graceful arms, that showed white within the full and drooping sleeves of travelling dress and pelisse, and with a gesture that owed more to practice and knowledge than to the impulse of the moment, lifted her veil. The face into which Theodore looked with such curiosity was round, short-nosed and fair-skinned, with

a certain decision of cheek-bone and forehead. Upon each temple lay a curl of yellow hair, frail and slight as a tendril of the vine. The slightly over-red lips were broadened, the light blue eyes suffused with tears, but it was laughter not grief that made them so. After a frank glance into Theodore's, those blue eyes were obscured by the tiny handkerchief with which she delicately wiped them, her bosom stirred by a happy sigh.

"Go on with your story," she adjured him.

"When next I became conscious I was alone in a place I had some difficulty in identifying as the forepeak of a barge. It was then early morning and I was the prisoner of the bargee and his wife."

"And what did she say to you?"

"He refused me any information, in fact ——"

"That I can imagine, but his wife ——!"

Theodore hesitated and blushed. He remembered clearly enough what the woman had done, but he was also impressed by the fact that on each occasion that he had related his adventure, to the captain, the banker, and now to this fair unknown, he caused amusement. Well trained from his schooldays to be the object of hard knocks and rough jokes, he yet had a pride that did not brook this continual indulgent mirth, and terminated his recital abruptly:

"—— however, when I reached Seaton I was able to find some acquaintance, and have been most kindly aided to return!"

"Your presence in Easthampton is urgently required?"

Theodore thought for a moment of Mr. Statchard's face.

"Yes."

"But you are not a native of the place, nor go there for business reasons!"

"I have known the town well since my schooldays, but after this week I shall have little occasion to go there in any event!"

"Whither, then, after this week?"

"Westminster or — I don't know! And since you ask so much, allow me to present myself — Mr. Theodore Carston, at your service!"

The lady gave a little start, he thought, at hearing the name, but did not cease to eye him with that still faintly smiling, unfathomable glance. She replied:

"My name, sir, would convey nothing to you. My business in Easthampton, the urgency of which you have been so good as to indulge, is to be strangled by my husband, a blackamoor, in a fit of jealousy ——"

"Madam!"

"Pray do not be alarmed, Mr. Carston. The occurrence is so frequent — regular in fact — that it has no terrors for me. I throw into the part of the victim all the passive ardour of which I am capable. It is my living, you see, to die in such circumstances. If it is not that, then, poisoned in the Capulet's family vault I lie, or drowned I float upon the stream. You will have perceived, sir, that I play the parts in the Company that occupies, for a season, the Royal Theatre in the town ——"

"Indeed, ma'am, I am vastly interested. I fear my present business will hardly admit of my witnessing your performance ——"

"There will, no doubt, be other opportunities. Our company usually reaches Easthampton in the course of the winter, but otherwise we play, when it is possible, in London, which of course we prefer."

"May I ask why?"

"A larger and more enlightened audience awaits us. The door money, our present reward, is more plentiful, and the renown, our hope of the future, is more likely to spread!"

"How free a life it must be, how light such an occupation must lie!" cried Theodore, thinking of the ponderous preoccupation of lawyer, banker, merchant, and of all that dumb rebellion he had felt gathering in the cellars and garrets of industry.

"Free enough, when one has nothing to do, light enough when the back is bare and the stomach empty!"

"True, true," admitted Theodore. "There is a want of permanence that must be distressing. How hollow must seem the high sentiments that you have to pronounce, the cardboard and tinsel feast ——"

"So long as the hollowness is stuffed with applause, sir, we may rest upon it!"

"But you have, I take it, no home ——"

"None. But those of us who are fortunate make friends ——" And here the lady smiled upon him so sweetly that Theodore could but remark the beauty

of contour, the deftness of pose that distinguished face and features.

"Friendship is a sufficient bond between those that are of like sex ——"

"Yet a doubtful one between two of the opposite sex."

"True. Something more — or something less must exist between them!"

"You speak from experience, Mr. Carston?"

So pleasant was their propinquity in the carriage, so flattering the attention that the lady paid him, that Theodore felt quite at home with her. Outside the weather was obliterating the view, and the warmth of the closed carriage misted the windows. Inside, Theodore, without searching in his mind as to what might be the actress's age, felt her to be his senior in knowledge, and was inclined to tell her about Marina. However he refrained, and for some distance they travelled in silence, save for the pattering of the rain, the howling of the wind, the rattle of the carriage, the music of the horses' tread. Twice he heard his companion sigh deeply, and was conscious enough that she was regarding him with her enigmatical, comprehending smile. Yet he felt his silence to be hardly civil, and cast about him for some subject which might afford an opportunity for agreeable conversation. After some time it occurred to him that his companion must have lived a very varied life and have travelled extensively, and that she might be not unwilling to recount some of

her journeys and triumphs, for he had heard that members of the theatrical profession were so imbued with the public atmosphere in which they lived, that they were never slow to speak of the places and parts in which they had appeared.

"I suppose, ma'am, that you must have played many parts in your time?"

It soon appeared that he had struck the right note in asking this question. His companion at once began an account of her life, beginning with her childhood, in which the earliest thing she could recollect was her *début* as an "Infant Prodigy" in "The Caliph of the Moors," her face blackened, and wearing as pantaloons the rose-coloured breeches that belonged to the part of Rosalind. From that day onward she appeared to have lived upon the road, passing from one English town to another, even crossing the seas to Dublin, Amsterdam, Stockholm and Lisbon, and penetrating as far as Milan on the one side and Dresden on the other. Each place was identified for her with the parts she had played, or by the fact that she had met there some notable, whose reputation she appeared to assume would be a commonplace with Theodore. He found the recital most interesting, though in certain passages incomprehensible, and endeavoured to show his appreciation by recalling prominent features of those places which he had also visited. Here, however, he failed to elicit a sign of interest. When he inquired: "And did you remark the extensive cultivation of the mulberry in

the Valley of the Arno?" or "Pray, were you not struck by the celebrated Venus, in the Herrburg Gallery," he was met with a charming smile, a hasty affirmative or a graceful avoidance. He, on his part, had some difficulty in following a narrative that demanded a knowledge of the theatre he did not possess. He was at a loss in the tangle of Christian names and titles of rôles, places on the map, and sou-briquets he had never heard. He was becoming quite incapable of straining his attention further, when he perceived, from the fact that the horses were walking, and from the tilt of the carriage, that they were descending a steep hill. Peering out into the gathering dusk, he was able to recognise the sharp descent into Easthampton. As the road turned beneath the stony scar, he saw the lights of the town come out below him. This also his companion did not miss. She interrupted the tale of her adventures to bring out from her reticule a small mirror, and some toilet preparation, with which she speedily effaced the traces of the journey; then adjusting her pelisse about her, begged to know at what house Mr. Carston intended to be set down.

"For there is upon this road," she continued, "a small inn which I know to be cheap and convenient, and shall not trouble you to take me so far as the centre of the town, where the larger houses are both expensive and disobliging."

Theodore expressed his willingness to fall in with her wishes, but was surprised when she said:

"This is the house. If you will be so good as to order the driver to stop, there only remains for me to thank you for your courtesy!"

He immediately rapped upon the glass and succeeded in conveying his intention. The carriage stopped, the door was opened, and with the promptitude of a life-time of travel, his companion alighted. He noticed that some persons were gathered about the doorway of the very place at which he had first seen Mr. Statchard, and where, subsequently, the cock-fight had been held. He searched for some correct and gentlemanly form of farewell, but was outdone by his erstwhile fellow-traveller, who swept him a professional curtsey, pressed upon him a printed bill, which he saw was an epitomised programme of the performances of the theatrical company, and bade him God-speed. The door was slammed, the conveyance started, and the last thing that he saw by the light from the inn doorway was the face of His Lordship's man, Ogle, regarding him with an expression, the meaning of which he was at a loss to fathom.

VIII

The Office

THEODORE had demanded to be driven to the George, and accordingly found himself passing under its low archway, where the lamps winked in the drizzle of the dark evening. The streets were denuded of all but foot passengers, the poorest buyers of an evening meal, and workmen going home. It was too wet for groups to gather outside the taverns, and the market people had furled their awnings, dismounted their booths and gone. If he expected to be anxiously awaited, he was soon undeceived. The yard was empty, the house quieter than usual. No maids were to be seen, and for some moments he stood in the main passage at the foot of the stairs, unnoticed. That the place was not deserted was proved by the clinking of china, and coo of confidential voices, coming from the back of the bar, and he made his way to Mrs. Armes' sanctum. That lady was taking tea and exchanging gossip with Mrs. Saint, the Mercer's wife, and Mrs. Benders, the house-keeper at the Bank. When he appeared, Mrs. Armes held the teapot arrested in mid-air, her friends their cups above their saucers, all opened their mouths and threw back their heads:

"Lor', Mr. Carston, what a start you did give me!" began the landlady, while her friends supported her

with, "Well, I never!" and "I thought it was an apparition!"

Theodore gave them good-evening and inquired for Mr. Statchard:

"He's gone home, and so's the Committee."

"Why, is not the election proceeding?"

"Lor,' Mr. Carston, who'd go on a-electioneerin' on a Sunday? Don't you know it's Saturday night?"

Theodore was bound to admit that he had lost sight of the fact. In doing so, he moved a step forward into the full light of the Snug.

"Why, Mr. Carston, whosever clothes have you got on? Those were never cut for you, I'll wager!"

He admitted it, and this drew from him a brief account of the day's adventure, which was received with many an exclamation, gasp, and rolling of the eye by the ladies.

"Well, I never," asserted Mrs. Armes, and her friends agreed that they never did, either!

"I think I must call on Mr. Statchard and explain," he concluded.

"If I might make so bold, sir, I would get a change of clothes afore you appear in public. Electors take a lot of notice of them things!"

"But I shan't see any of them until Monday, whereas it is most important that I should acquaint Mr. Statchard with my return!"

"Look you here, sir," advised Mrs. Armes, "you walk down Bishopgate to Mr. Statchard and see him, and whiles you're a-doing that, I'll have fresh horses

put in, and you shall be drove back to Hoake, where your clothes are. That'll be something like!" And without consulting him further, she gave a tug at one of the bell-pulls and began issuing orders to Ben, with the result that, by the time he had swallowed a cup of tea, the ostler had set the boy astir with a fresh pair of horses, and was ready to walk with him to Mr. Statchard's "to see you ain't a-molested!" as Mrs. Armes put it. Out into drizzling dark he was guided.

A few steps took them into Bishopgate, and having inquired the number, Theodore considered it unnecessary to retain the services of his guide. He therefore tendered the man a shilling, and asked him to be sure the carriage was ready against his return in about half an hour. He was met with a respectful but flat refusal:

"Beggin' your parding, sir, but I'm a-comin' along with ye!"

"There is no need. It is but a few yards, and I shall find the house!"

"Missis' orders have got to be obeyed, sir. There's been rum doings in the town, and there's no knowing what might become of ye!"

"I believe I can look after myself!"

"You don't know, sir. The Blues'd be mighty glad to catch y' walking alone!"

"They have no reason to bear malice!"

"No, sir, only all the windows in the King's Head was broke, this forenoon ——"

"Was there a riot?"

"A little feelin', you might say, sir!"

Theodore was young enough to savour the fun.

"What was it all about?"

"Why, sir, when our people found that you'd been cooped ——"

"Cooped?"

"Made off with! Lor', sir, any one can see you haven't bin in many elections!"

"Indeed, I have not!"

"Well, they got the notion you was in the King's Head cellar."

"I see. Made a prisoner!"

"Tha's right, sir. Our people started breaking windows. So the Mayor, he read his piece ——"

"Read the Riot Act!"

"Yessir. And they all went home!"

It was circumstantial enough, and Theodore deeply sympathised with that English sentiment of making a sufficient commotion and going home. The passers-by were now peaceful-looking and preoccupied with the small affairs of a townsman's Saturday night, the night of the week enlightened by the coming Sunday. Theodore had seen it in Mrs. Armes' face and manner, it was all about. At the same time there might always be partisans as relentless as Ben, on the opposite side, so he let the man walk beside him, until they came to No. 42.

The house was old, huddled under a heavy thatch, sparse of small windows, and flush with the old wall that mounted from this end of Bishopgate to the

bridge over the river. A low doorway was filled by a door with a highly polished knocker, and number in brass, and the effect was just such a one as Mr. Statchard's dwelling might have been expected to produce — of discretion, great antiquity, and complete efficiency within rather narrow limits. The woman who answered Theodore's knock was something between housekeeper and housemaid, impenetrable, devoted. While she did not admit that her master was in, and would "go and see," yet on learning the visitor's name, she gave him a look as though he had been expected, and left him in the low confined hall, in which, beneath a thick carpet, he could feel stone flags. A small lamp burned, well-shaded, and the atmosphere was far less cold than that of most entrance halls. He was soon summoned to a room which was simply an enlargement of the same limited but realised perfection. For an aging bachelor who appeared to have no interest outside his profession, it was an abode to which, Theodore saw, nothing could be added. Completely lined with books on legal subjects, except where two small square windows and a door were heavily curtained, the place seemed to enclose Mr. Statchard only a little less closely than his black mummy-wrappings of clothes. The fireplace, broad, old-fashioned and blazing, was surmounted with yet more shelves, and provided the only concession to lay ideas of comfort; save the carpet slippers into which Mr. Statchard's feet were astonishingly thrust.

"Well, young man?" was the greeting. And the words seemed to mean, "Let us have the facts, though we know 'em already!" Behind their owner, the books stood ranked, an army of facts, of precedent, of judgment delivered, of appeal dismissed. Theodore felt his story to be lame and unconvincing, he almost felt at fault. He had been brought up in no soft school, and hardly expected pity. His was the English tradition of laughing at hard knocks and returning them. It was, at the moment, a little difficult to know how to do the latter. But he was agreeably surprised when Mr. Statchard, who had merely motioned him to a chair, asked if he would not share his brandy and water. Theodore thanked him, and found it excellent. Its glow seemed even to inform Mr. Statchard's dry, unvarying certitude, and he said:

"We shall profit by your misfortunes!"

"How is that?"

"Feeling has run very high! A regular assault was made on the King's Head."

"So I learn. I was very gratified by the solicitude evinced for my welfare!"

"They say here, Knock breeds Knock. It is true of all East Anglia!"

"I understand that the Mayor was obliged to take the proper precautions for preventing disturbance!"

"That will save us the trouble of instituting proceedings in your case. We shall disclaim responsibility of course, for the windows!"

"To-morrow, naturally, will be a day of quiet."

"We must not let that influence feeling. The poll will be open on Monday, and we shall need to show that we have opinion with us!"

"My presence will be necessary?"

"At an early hour. I will call for you to-morrow evening, and bring you up to the George. It will be necessary for you to occupy your room there during the succeeding days!"

"You may depend upon me, Mr. Statchard."

The lawyer nodded and gazed inscrutably at him. Theodore was uncertain whether to take his leave immediately, but Mr. Statchard continued: "You will spend to-morrow at the Rectory, doubtless. Curious thing, their using the name of the person staying at the Rectory for a decoy!"

Theodore, while astonished at the old man's complete knowledge of the bogus message, was most unwilling to discuss this aspect of the affair, and returned:

"The part of the whole affair that strikes me as most curious is the way I was allowed to leave Seaton without difficulty!"

"Oh, that's plain enough. They won't put themselves in the wrong. They would say you were guilty of trespass, and not under constraint. But with regard to that other matter, it would seem that there must be a spy about the place. You must be guarded in what you say and do!"

"I will; good night, Mr. Statchard."

"Good night."

Outside, his escort was waiting for him. The weather was clearing and far from cold. As they ascended the old street it was evident that the crowd was thinning, the domestic festival of the week-end dominating all thoughts. Just as they were turning out of Bishopgate into the Market Place, a youngish man with a snub nose covered with freckles, lifted a very tall hat with a certain ceremony:

"Good evening, Mr. Carston!"

"Good evening!"

"Very glad to see you back with us. None the worse?"

It had not dawned on Theodore that he would have to face this. The interest of his immediate supporters, the general interest of his party he had calculated upon, but this inquisitive stranger he had not foreseen. He replied:

"No, I thank you!" and would have passed on, but the other was at his elbow, and Ben had gone forward to the George entry. The young man persisted:

"I should be most obliged if you would allow me to know your impressions of Seaton ——"

"I cannot say that I derived any strong impressions ——"

"You returned here, accompanied by the leading lady of the company now playing at the Royal Theatre ——"

"Upon my word, sir, I cannot imagine why you

should take so intimate an interest in my affairs."

Here the young man sidled somewhat towards him, saying in the tone between that of a priest bestowing a benediction and of a tout imparting a tip:

"*The Gazette!*"

Theodore was vaguely aware that two papers existed in Easthampton. He connected them with week-old Court news and advertisements of the standing of stallions. He supposed that he had a quasi-public duty towards them, and curbed the resentment he felt at the young man's pertinacity. This person was saying:

"Our readers will be most interested to know how you escaped and about your journey back."

Theodore was extremely reluctant to afford any information on these points. There was something in the young man's manner, in which a too facile self-assurance seemed perpetually to be adjusting itself to the imaginary standards of a hypothetical body called "our readers" or "the public" that made his genteel reserve shrink from the contact. But he was aware that this was no moment to alienate the support that a newspaper was supposed to provide any public man, and he was casting about for a suitable excuse that should enable him to seek the privacy of the George yard. The young man was before him:

"Your carriage is not ready yet; perhaps you would not be unwilling to take a dozen oysters with me?"

As if to support the suggestion, here was Ben touching his forelock apologetically: "Man's havin' his tea, sir, won't be long!" Theodore nodded and went along with his new acquaintance.

They passed along Regent Parade, and turned into the narrow streets beside the swine market. Theodore, thoroughly on his guard, wondered for the moment if he were being led into some ambushade, but curiosity, the confidence of youth, brandy, and a healthy feeling that a dozen of oysters would fill a certain vacancy he felt, kept him stepping boldly beside his companion, and in a few yards the latter turned aside into the low doorway of a bow-fronted little shop, before which half a dozen hand-barrows were parked in the gutter. Within, the light of a lantern disclosed a great slab of wood, and a row of tubs, but the nose far more emphatically perceived an atmosphere of Seaton, of fish and salt, while the foot ground upon sand, and slipped upon scales. At the back was a doorway lighted by a window on which was painted, a letter to each small pane, the words:

OYSTER ROOM

The young man held this open for Theodore, who entered a small cabin-like apartment, almost filled by a solid table, covered with a coarse cloth. The odour of fish was here concentrated in the person of a swarthy bearded man in woollen jersey, apron and fur cap, who, sufficiently dressed to have withstood a moderate gale in open sea, seemed in the con-

fined space to flavour everything with his short clay pipe, his clothes, himself. To this person the young man cried heartily, "Evenin', Jonah, two dozen of the very best!" and turning to Theodore, inquired:

"What shall we float them upon? Porter is the usual, stout can be had very good, or are you used to take a French wine with them?"

Theodore declared for porter, recalling as it did certain escapades of his schooldays, stolen leave for just such a repast, or the visits of Mr. Burgess, in those days a kindly guardian. The bivalves were brought, the liquor fetched, and Theodore realised the hunger which excitement and adventure had given him. Under the stimulus of food and drink he replied more indulgently to the questions that were put to him, partly because he was more interested in dashing his shell-fish with vinegar and pepper and swallowing them, between satisfying draughts of the staunch malt liquid, than in what he was saying, partly because he had told his story to the captain, the banker, the actress and Mr. Statchard, and was heartily sick of it. His new friend had pushed back the tall hat that raked at a seemingly impossible angle from the back of his head and appeared to be able to talk without interrupting mastication. The namesake of the prophet stood in the doorway, pipe in mouth, surveying them and attending to their wants with a rough serviceable alacrity. A second dozen each followed the first, and the stone jorum was refilled. The inquiries continued:

“—— and did you not set down a lady, as you passed the Warrener Inn, Mr. Carston?”

“I do not know the name of the place!”

“It is on the Seaton road, above the bridge!”

Theodore nodded in what he conceived to be a non-committal fashion and buried his face in his pot.

“Had you any previous acquaintance with the lady, or did you meet her in Seaton?”

“I gave her a lift as a matter of courtesy,” replied Theodore, once more beset by the feeling of lameness, but at a loss how else to reply. His questioner did not seem to notice his hesitation, but ran off with a panegyric of the acting at the theatre and assurances to Theodore that he should on no account miss witnessing a performance. Theodore had now appeased his hunger and felt that he had done all that civility demanded on behalf of so ambiguous a member of society as a writer for a newspaper, and desired to take his leave. His friend, after pressing him to engage upon a third dozen and another quart, and finding it useless, bade him adieu with much ceremony and effusion, lifting his hat, for the first time during their brief acquaintance and displaying a head almost bare of hair save for the sandy fringe. After which he resumed his place, ordered further refreshments, and fell into conversation with Jonah.

Theodore regained the George without difficulty, and on threading his way through the tipsy confusion of the last farmers’ gigs and carriers’ carts, that,

with the conclusion of the market day, were now leaving the yard, found Ben and his driver standing beside the carriage with the fresh horses. Mrs. Armes leaned out of the Snug window to give some good advice, but perceiving her to be in that garrulous state of familiarity that crowned her week's activity, he cut her short by entering the carriage, slamming the door and giving the word. The fresh horses made quick work of the emptying streets, and he was soon bowling along the country road. The rain had ceased, through straggling clouds the moon began to shine, and this together with the stimulant of which he had partaken and the feeling of throwing off Easthampton and leaving behind all it contained, began to change his mood. From time to time during the adventurous and tiring day his thoughts had turned to Marina, and dwelt with pleasure on the vision of her conjured up, with its contrasting delicacy, intimacy, and relief from the onerous part he was striving to play in the election. Now he was fast going to her, and as he drew nearer, she occupied an increasing place in his thoughts. She appeared constant and fixed beyond the shifting scenes of his active day. He began to picture to himself how she would look, what greeting she would give him, his reply and her response.

Outside, the trees were stamped in black on silver, the rare dwellings all closed and quiet. The rhythmic motion of the horses and wheels seemed to imprison him as if by enchantment. Then, above a

stark hedge, there came into view the plain square tower of the church, the elms inseparable from it in any English village, the huddle of steep roofs. The street with its forge, shop and inn passed in a flash. He felt his return to the familiar place to be just as much a return from a journey as his actual return from abroad, that was but such a short while ago, and now seemed half a lifetime away. Here was the neat hedge about the low paling, the white gate, the substantial bulk of the Rectory.

There was no need to knock. The door was opened and there stood the faithful Jordan, ready to usher him in, to warn the company of his arrival, to be enjoined to see that the driver had, in the local phrase, "something to take." It was, however, into the study that he was shown, where the Rector had just got up from his chair, removed his spectacles, and was passing his hand over his face as though to remove the traces of profound meditation and studious reading (or could it be merely sleep? flashed through Theodore's mind) and to spread in place of those, the benignity of one who was reverend and authoritative and kind-hearted all at once.

"Theodore! Not over-fatigued, I trust?"

"Not uncomfortably so, sir. But glad enough of a brief holiday!"

"You find the contest a keen one!"

"That would be only one word of the many that must be employed to describe the proceedings!"

"By the way, we had a note by messenger from

Mr. Statchard, in the forenoon, inquiring if we had seen anything of you."

At this point, it was announced that the house-keeper had made a Welsh rarebit, and that it must be eaten hot. They therefore adjourned to the dining-room, where, before a well-kept-in fire, Theodore supped in comfort, and Mr. Burgess was able to set flowing once more the gentle stream of his inquiries.

"I replied that we had not, and did not expect to know more of your whereabouts than he did; the ladies, I must say, took a somewhat graver view than I" — here a faint indulgent approval seemed to visit the reverend gentleman's face — "but I reassured them, and they consented to retire early, and to leave me to sit up for you!"

To Theodore, the ladies meant one young lady, and the thought that she had divined his dangers and discomforts thrilled him. He felt obliged to give his host and tutor some account of what had happened to him, treating it in the humorous vein, and abridging it so that from Mr. Doughty he came straight to Mr. Statchard, already perceiving that his ride in the coach would be at best a dubious matter to reverend ears. The sixth repetition of his day's doings bored him, his mouth was full, and his ears wearied of his listener's perpetual "Dear me!" "Really!" "Humph!" and "Hah!" His thoughts were a mixture of regret that Marina should have allowed herself to be persuaded to go to bed, desire to be let alone, pleasant lassitude in the warm com-

fortable room, agreeable sense of security in his tutor's presence, but above all a growing drowsiness. His repast ended, he made no objection to the proposal,

"Well, well. After that, you will be ready for bed!"

This form of dismissal meant, as Theodore knew, that Mr. Burgess, after the kindest wishes for a peaceful night, would subside into his armchair, draw towards him his book-rest, upon which was a volume of digest or apothegm and subside into a state of torpor, which he alleged to be study but which others might describe as dozing. This would continue until the heavy old clock would interrupt its deep-toned tick, by a whirring, a cluck, and a solemn announcement of midnight. At which the Rector would suddenly reverse his position, and kneeling with his elbows on the seat of the chair, would offer thanks to Almighty God for the benefits he had received, and walk solemnly up to bed, winding his watch and extinguishing lights on his way. Theodore had heard him hundreds of times. So he left him to this routine and took his own way upstairs, his body aching with fatigue, his head sore but drowsy, his thoughts piqued by the fact that She had been anxious for him, his lips slightly soured by the fact that she had not waited up to see him. The hall was lighted by a little oil lamp on a bracket, that threw sufficient light on the stairs, from the head of which he could reach his own door, and

promising himself to fling off his clothes and be asleep in two minutes, he scorned his candle, and trod yawningly but confidently the thick old carpet of the landing.

At this moment, as he turned to the left, his half-submerged senses caught a tiny sound — whether it were a gasp or sigh, or movement of the night breeze in casement or keyhole, he did not disturb himself to wonder. It was then, with a slight shock, that he realised he was not alone. His scalp moved as if with fright, but it was rather that primitive extra sense that gives warning of the approach of some living thing, before sight, hearing or touch can operate. Then he did see something white, feel something soft and warm press against his side from shoulder to knee, a touch on his cheek that might be a lock of hair, and a faint feminine scent stole up to him with a vibrating whisper:

“You are safe!”

His senses now leapt to realisation. She cared. She had lain awake, she had actually come out of her room to make certain of him. He divined in a moment the strength and the delicacy of that half-seen, hardly-perceived creature beside him. He must at once reassure, and besiege and respect and defend her, who had felt so deeply, dared so much. He flung his arms round her convulsively and bent his head to that spot where, beneath the lace cap that contained her hair, the soft skin met his lips. Without a struggle, with a deft instinctive move-

ment, she slipped from him. He only heard, "Not now," only felt a finger stroke his face from eyebrow to lip, and a door close softly. He was alone.

It was so swift and conclusive that he stumbled to his own door, took a step back, then went into his room and closed the door behind him. The whirling blood in his head drove him back, something very still and deep down in him, a sense of benediction almost, sent him forward. How could he remain away from her a moment longer, yet how could he disobey that whispered command, to him so sacred, and pursue her? He pulled off his boots, and sitting, his head nodded. He jerked it up, rose, took off his coat, hesitated — and then took off his cravat. Before he had reconciled the warring elements in himself, he lay in his short shirt, between the sheets, soft with a thousand washings and ironings. Wash his face he would not. The place that she had touched should remain unwashed in the hope that her fragrance lingered there. Supine in the soft, well-warmed old bed, his feelings began automatically to adjust themselves. Soon he needed nothing but to lie there, in beatitude. From all the violent complications of the past week he was now delivered. She loved him. He loved her. The simplicity of it! All life seemed to have shrunk to the scale of their mutual importance, and the unimportance of all else. She was near. There was only the old, little-used box-room between them. She was nearer in spirit, where there were no box-rooms. What were period

and dimension now, what were ambition and experience, career and travel? He had achieved the ultimate. He did achieve it that instant. He fell asleep.

IX

The Church

HE awoke to the grey morning with an utter difficulty in imagining where he was, and a strong inclination to stay there in comfort. He was stiff and sore, had a cold in the head, and as his mind cleared, a doubt in his heart. He searched for the deep secret comfort in which he had slept so securely. It had receded and diminished. He was faced with the perplexity of meeting in the plain and obvious intercourse of the breakfast-table, before other people, her whom he wanted to meet in secret, alone. He became aware, with alarm and discomfort, that he would have to make some formal announcement to the Rector and her mother, and this hurt him, because it made him feel as if he were parting with something private and sacred as his religious convictions, and also because he really did not know that he wanted to be a betrothed, a prospective married man.

It seemed premature and doubtful. What he saw as love, the elders, and behind them all the world, regarded with a faint tolerance, and a wholly impertinent interest, as marriage. He was conscious enough of the sort of smile, the nature of question that came readily enough to his lips, when he heard that this old schoolfellow, that chance acquaintance, was to be married. Now that smile, those questions,

would be directed at him. It was not the same thing at all. And while he struggled with the problem, there came up to him the odour of coffee and frying eggs, the flat habitual voices and movements below, and leaping from bed he dressed with some care, and went down.

On Sundays the Rector of Hoake presented, possibly from instinct, or from habit, but most of all from a deep-seated sense of the sanctity of his calling and his fitness for it, an aspect in which the priest slightly overpowered the gentleman, reversing the proportion of the other six days. The remarks that Theodore had heard Mr. Varley make to Mr. Starchard, to the effect that there was only one day on which a parson worked, was less true than mildly unkind, but Theodore admitted to himself that to-day the grave pleasant face bore a shade of austerity, the homely manners a hint of reserve. The fact was so well known that all members of the household unconsciously became extra punctual on that morning, and they followed close on Theodore's heels, and he was just behind the tray. Greetings passed, all seated themselves at once, the rich country food was apportioned, the beverage distributed with brief sufficient words of inquiry and acceptance; no one at that breakfast of all the week would indulge a fancy or own an indisposition, while the weather was the only possible topic. Fortunately it was one at which the elders excelled, and Theodore and Marina were relieved from the necessity for being conversa-

tional and the danger of being remarkable. This was more to his advantage than to hers, for there was present, and felt by both, that influence like the magnetic affinity of certain metals, attracting their glances to meet, and repelling them as instantaneously towards their plates; and while the effect upon her was to bring a faint dimple to the corner of the lip, a delicate flush to the cheek, that might mean nothing more than excellent health and spirits, to him it brought a trembling and preoccupation that caused him to crumble his crisp bacon on to the stainless table-cloth and put mustard in his coffee instead of upon his plate. Yet for all his perturbation, it thrilled him, that brilliant glance of eyes of which the tropics seemed to have burnt the colour, and polished the lustre.

The period succeeding breakfast at the Rectory on Sunday mornings was, in theory, devoted to meditation suitable to prepare the mind for the religious exercises of the day. In reality, the Rector disappeared into his study, Mrs. Burgess scanned a volume of sermons, Marina, of a younger and more rebellious generation, fidgeted, sewed, or leaned upon the casement, gazing out upon the prospect, if possible more blankly peaceful on that day than upon any other. Theodore wandered in the bereaved and empty garden, on damp paths between bare, well-manured beds, all asleep in expectation of the season to come. He caught sight of a face and figure at the upper windows once and again, but made no sign, so

strong upon him was the habit of the place and hour. Then the first bell began, regular and monotonous, insistent and compelling. He ran in, changed his coat, secured his books, and, as the party assembled, joined them, at the Rector's word, "It is time to go!"

The Rector walked with his sister-in-law, Theodore had the felicity of offering his arm to Marina. She took it with a glance up at him, no word. So along the quiet street to the lych-gate, from whence the path under the limes, between the gravestones, was lined with bare-headed labourers, their bonneted wives and bobbing children, all waiting for the Rectory party to go in, and following upon its heels as soon as it did so.

By contrast with the scenes of the previous week, Theodore saw the stone edifice which had been familiar to him every week for years, in a new light. After the passions, the shiftiness, the uncertainty and commotion of a largish town trying to govern itself, the village flocking into that one building so ripe with age, which held them all so easily, where they were told what to do in the fatherly voice of the Rector, presented a grateful simplicity and decorum. He had never noticed it before, but he did so now. What a pity that the Cathedral of Easthampton would not hold the entire town, direct its politics, satisfy its aspirations. Alas, how unwieldy a thing prosperity becomes.

The Church of St. Laurence the Martyr, at Hoake, was, as Theodore had frequently heard the Rector

say, a remarkable example of the slow and natural growth of our National Church. It was placed upon a site identified in the Itinerary of Blagovarius as being used by the earliest barbaric inhabitants for some horrid festival of theirs. The early missionaries had induced the mixture of Saxon raider and enslaved native whom they found there to lay the stones of the first church on that very site, and the round tower they built was still the base of the larger and later one. The martyrdom of St. Laurence was commemorated, about 1450 A.D., in the spandrels of the South Porch, where a crudely nude saint was portrayed stretched upon what appeared to be a clothes-horse, being tortured ingeniously by nude figures variously interpreted as Romans and as demons, and pointed out to gentlemen visitors, but not to ladies. A more civilised generation had heightened the tower, enlarged the nave, added great windows in the perpendicular style, but the chancel remained low, crabbed and dark, half fortress, half shrine, as if to remind the comfortable nineteenth century of the vicissitudes of earlier ones.

As Theodore established himself in the well-cushioned horse-box pew (reserved for the Rectory party more strictly than ever was opera box for Royalty) he could but reflect that the beautiful lighting of the place was not unlike that of some of the great houses he had visited in the valley of the Loire. The odour, on the other hand, was simply that of the grave, and the sound reminded him of the

ship in which he had crossed the Channel, the high-up far-off whistling of the wind that blew round bell-rope and beam in the high tower.

He was, though, too young, too ardent to dwell among the realities of the moment. The Church of St. Laurence had long grown beyond the prehistoric pitch-pipe, and its psalmody was now led by a small band, cornet, flute and double bass, in the gallery above the west door. To these he accorded the indulgent smile of the travelled and educated young man to the note of comedy. Then rose the suave, certain tones of the Rector, the dry, mechanical ones of the clerk pronouncing those well-worn, solemn words, and he stood, knelt, responded or sang, according the respect due to the voice of authority. But already his glance kept wandering to his side, his thoughts farther away still. By chance, or precedence, Mrs. Burgess had entered first and seated herself, slightly turning to the window, for her sight was none too good, and she was one of those who, even for the thousandth repetition, must see the actual words. Next to her was Marina. Then Theodore. By chance or design, they had but one book. Both must hold it, one must turn the pages. So, as may have happened before, and will happen again, the psalm and epistle and collect became dressed in the colour of bright eyes, and to Theodore, Everlasting Salvation was something contained in that living creature whose arm touched his, but whose every thought and action were so utterly unknown or inex-

plicable to him. Then came the sermon. They sat side by side, and while Mrs. Burgess, overcome by eloquence, nodded sagely, Theodore found a little finger, and imprisoned it, where it lay upon the cushion of the seat, in his own. From time to time he caught beneath the rim of her bonnet, the outline of her profile, pure and youthful, and wondered what she was thinking. To her, so far as could be seen, no such wonderment occurred. There was a deep and solemn happiness that looked neither forward nor back, but was utterly content with the present moment, with the chance that allowed their fingers to intertwine unseen; that acquiesced so charmingly in the profundities of the rhetoric from the pulpit, and did not, to all appearance, feel that urgency which beset him to know how and when they might go much further, become far more intimate and certain with each other.

This problem was unsolved when the Benediction arrived. Once more they stood to sing, and then came filing out, to wait outside for the Rector to hurry preoccupied from the vestry door, beset at every yard by clerk and sexton, this woman or that small boy, upon parish business. At length they were able to return to the Rectory, the Rector with his usual alacrity, as of one who felt "That's well over!" but now masked by a fussiness over the attendance, as to who was there and who was not, over the psalmody and behaviour, and the sundry matters that had supervened.

From custom, the reason of which, if any, was buried in the past and never inquired into, they dined at the Rectory at one o'clock on Sundays, as befitted those who were, for the nonce, Christians more than gentlemen and gentlewomen. After that the Rector had some school-children to instruct, and Mrs. Burgess, duty being the order of the day, wrote to her surviving relatives, to one or two acquaintances with whom she kept up a desultory correspondence at home or abroad. Suddenly Theodore saw Heaven open before him. He kept his head down, his eyes well covered, until the Rector had said at what hour he would return, and Mrs. Burgess had asked Marina whether she desired her kind regards sent to this, that and the other person. The elders disappeared. It was one of the rules of the house that the servants had leisure on Sunday afternoon, and that so long as the table was cleared in time to be set for tea, no greater haste was demanded of them. In perfect peace and stillness Theodore watched his beloved rise, give him one enigmatical glance, and humming to herself the refrain of one of those songs that she was not allowed to practise on Sunday, hesitate once and again before the well-known and regularly observed pictures of the dining-room walls. There could surely be nothing new to be discovered in the Welsh landscape, the Italian view, the oval still life of grapes and peaches and currants, the other of a pheasant, a trout and a melon, not even a new light by which to see them. Why, or why, did she linger

before Rochester Cathedral from the South and the ruins of Walsingham Priory, or before Belvoir Castle, the seat of the most noble the Marquis of Portrush? A deep suspicion burned in him an instant. Did she do it on purpose? But, unhastening and seeming to balance herself a little on each foot, one hand on her hip and her face turned resolutely away, she slipped noiselessly from the dining-room. When he saw her go he started up as if put in motion by a mechanical contrivance, and almost ran round the table, knocking over a glass and kicking a chair. By the time he got to the door, that of the drawing-room closed before him. He crossed the empty hall in two strides, wrenched it open. She was gazing out out of the low window as composedly as though the weather of the settled grey afternoon were the most enthralling, the only object of possible interest. What did she mean? Was he utterly deceived in her? Did she care so little? He had read of women who toyed with men's feelings from greed for admiration, idleness, who knows what, but he hardly believed in them. Surely she could not make such sport of him! And half in remonstrance, half in supplication, he flung his arms about her and strained her to him, crying:

"Oh! Marina!"

These words, that tone, acted like a charm. Her erectly carried figure seemed to dissolve in his arms. Her head fell back, as though that creamy neck were nerveless, and the dark ringlets lay upon his breast.

Her lips were half open, her eyes half closed. To gaze into them gave him a strange feeling of dizziness, as once before, upon a ledge in the Apennines, he had gazed from the road, downward through the sun-gilded chestnut foliage, and interweaving shafts of sunlight, trying to pierce the mystery and beauty of those golden-brown depths, and suddenly discovered that they concealed a precipice. So, now, he felt a sudden alarm. He might go down, down into such depths. They both swayed a moment, and she had so abandoned herself, that he was obliged to shift his foot, to support her. This brought his head lower, and his lips encountered hers. Sight was exchanged for a closer, and even more disturbing contact. His heart beat furiously, all else but the touch of that flower-like mouth deserted him. Then, as suddenly, she walked out of his arms, some three or four paces to the hearth-rug, and stood with her back to him, giving herself a little shake, making tiny adjustments, leaving him not knowing what to do with his hands. He was visited by a crushing compunction. He had treated her like a chamber-maid caught in a passage. She was a lady. What would she think, or, worse, do? She did nothing. In the portentous silence he walked towards her laboriously, for he was trembling. He felt the need of making some immediate reparation for his conduct, and of bridging the gulf that had so swiftly replaced that instant of perilous intimacy, of saving the showered riches of that moment that had been flung upon him and fallen, like spray.

With the best voice he could control, in the simplest, most formal phrase he could muster, he asked her if she would marry him. He could hardly catch her reply, "I don't know!"

This was tragic, and he implored her:

"You will let me love you?"

She turned to him a smile so sweet, so serious. "Yes!" A frown replaced it, and a sigh followed that affirmative. "Only, take me away from here!"

While completely incomprehensible, the words were so practical, so far removed from the haze of emotion that had preceded them, that they put him on an easier footing with her. He was able to draw her down on to the settee beside him, where she leaned a little against him, pressing him slightly with her shoulder at his anxious, "I will, I will!"

Then it occurred to him that he was a Parliamentary candidate, and he ventured:

"When?"

"When you are victorious!" she beamed, and with a queer sensation he realised that to her, the election was a personal contest, a sort of race between himself and Sir Curtius Hamilton.

"Suppose I am beaten?"

"You will not be!" It was frightfully implicit. He dared not argue.

"Victory means residence in London. Otherwise ——"

"Otherwise I shall not care!"

"You will always love me?"

"Always, always to the end of the world!"

"Darling!"

There was no need to ask what it might mean. The single-minded warmth of it was enough. He was happy in that, and in the eyebrow that brushed his lips. She spoke first.

"I was so dreadfully anxious yesterday!"

"You knew something had happened?"

"That Mr. Statchard sent to ask if you had been here. I so wished you had!"

"So did I."

"I felt so miserable at not knowing."

"It is over now."

"To begin again to-morrow!"

"A little patience, my dear one!"

"Patience! the watchword for women!" she was almost sneering. "Mine is long worn out!"

He did not know what to say, so caressed her hand.

"At least I shall know this time. I have persuaded Mamma to obtain a seat at Mrs. Saint's upper window for to-morrow, to see the opening of the poll!"

"Gloriously well done! I shall be in good heart!"

"It is all I can do." She was mournful again. He would have loved to have comforted her, to have said how nobly she fulfilled her woman's part. But to be with her was like the short sailing trip he had induced Mr. Burgess to take among the Dalmatian islands. There at every turn he had passed from one point of precipitous beauty to another as unknown,

from calm land-locked channels to the open Adriatic, from hints of dangerous robber-infested coves to the stagnant safety of Venice. So now he navigated, by turn boldly, then cautiously amid the beauties of her fleeting glances, and the perils of her sudden moods. He was urgent to confirm his bliss.

"May I speak to your mother?"

"For what purpose?"

"To ask her ——"

"Once and for all, I dispose of myself."

"To acquaint her, then!"

She mused, softened, her fingers lay upon his arm.

"Not yet."

"Must I have patience?"

"A little!"

"Marina! Loveliest! Are you not certain?"

"As certain as you are certain."

She had pierced him and he dropped his eyes. Was he certain? Very! Yet it was all so new, so strange, so wonderful. He shied at the word, but got out, "I am!"

"Then I am!" She took his hand frankly, as if in comradeship as well as love. "But I could not bear the gossiping, the patronage, the permission, that all the neighbourhood will accord. When the election is over ——"

She paused. Theodore was abashed by her vehemence. But she added simply and softly,

"— then, I will marry you!"

At this, what could Theodore do but take her in

his arms. She yielded, all the agitation gone out of her, and once more Theodore was visited by compunction. The novel thought struck him, that hers was a hard lot. From a remote and inaccessible creature, self-contained, she had in so short a time become an intimate part of himself. Then had come her bitter words, her unaccountable petulances, dragging him this way and that because, it followed, he was part of her. Now here she was, within his arm, needing protection, a being physically small and weaker than he. Being kind-hearted, he cast about to say that which should distract her attention, and to do that which might reassure her apprehensions. He talked therefore of the sights she should see, the journeys she should make when they went a-traveling together. She made only short and intermittent replies, but the subject appeared to suit her, for although she had been born and brought up so far away, she had sailed straight to London, and had left an obscure lodging in the metropolis only to come to Hoake. Thus she was entirely ignorant of polite travel, of the routine of the grand tour, of the elegancies and interest of those resorts of central and southern Europe which the peaceful conditions of the past decade had thrown open to English people of the genteel classes, and which, as Theodore pointed out to her, offered all the advantages of the select quality of English society, together with a breadth of opportunity for entertainment and enlightenment which could rarely be obtained in a

more domestic situation, encumbered by duties and responsibilities.

Thus passed the quiet hour, swiftly as only such hours can for those for whom life henceforward is something held in common. The winter dusk drew in, and sounds in the passage revealed surprisingly to the pair of lovers, that they were not the only people in the world, nor all existence confined to the settee on which they sat. Theodore frowned and Marina sighed, but neither was able to deny that the Rector's newly-formed habit of taking tea on his return from the duties of the afternoon, and before those of the brief Evensong, would shortly bring their intimate moments to an end. Fortunately, so warned, they were able to separate by the width of the hearth-rug, he standing by the mantelshelf, she reclining on the settee when the door was opened by the maid, bringing lights. The sudden revelation of the two figures seemed to cause the girl unwonted consternation. She staggered, dropped a candle, and placing the other more by luck than skill upon a table, ran out of the room in confusion.

"It would seem that we are bidden to take tea!" The interruption jarred on Theodore. Marina was graver.

"That girl is either much stupider than would seem possible, or else she bears me a grudge."

"A villager in awe of the Rectory!" Theodore was incredulous. With a silent pressure of the fingers they parted. Marina sought her mother.

She, so offhand and difficult, was kind and dutiful towards her parent, to whom the duty letters that she wrote on Sunday afternoons were a penance, reminding her as they inevitably did of the days when she had been a person of consequence and not a mere dependent.

The Rector came bustling back, rosy with the chill air, and with just that shade more of authority in his demeanour that marked the difference between Sunday and week-day. The urn was brought, the cups of delicate china. The conversation adjusted itself to that moment of all the week, that pre-eminently English festival. Partly because he resented the loss of intimacy with his beloved, partly perhaps from something old-fashioned and blue-blooded in him that made him feel it to be a bourgeois occasion, partly from youth and vigour that urged him to activities less mildly platitudinous, Theodore felt uncomfortable. The presence of Marina, whom he was, by her own desire, condemned to treat with the correct courtesy of mere acquaintance, tantalised him. The necessity for pretence irked him. The beverage, well-brewed and subtle, did not seem to him to harmonise with the moment. He was hardly sorry when he heard the wheels upon the gravel and it was announced that Mr. Statchard waited on him.

He made no delay, but briefly promising to see his tutor and the ladies in the morning, he buttoned himself up against the cold evening, and was soon

being carried away from the Sabbath peace of Hoake, to that other new and absorbing life of his.

The lawyer was, as usual, impenetrable. Whether merely from age and life-long political training, or some inherent legal quality, Theodore found, on this occasion as on all others, that Mr. Statchard asked questions and extracted answers, but replied only in the briefest fashion. Whatever efforts were made, the conversation took a Statchardesque turn, and kept on turning to some conclusion that was beyond Theodore's sight, thus:

"What household does the Rector keep?"

"Himself, and his sister-in-law, her daughter, his man and wife!"

"Is there not a maid-servant?"

"Yes."

"Are you acquainted with the village people?"

"Some I know by sight, but mostly by the Christian name."

"Would you know if any strangers were about?"

"I do not feel sure. If they were gipsies ——"

"Others?"

"No."

"Do you hear the gossip of the place?"

"Only so far as it concerns sport!"

"Poaching?"

"I might hear it mentioned, but that is the affair of the keepers!"

"Entirely."

Then, of all the queer subjects:

"There is a convict escaped!"

"Really!" Theodore was not interested, and wanted to know what were the prospects of the contest. This subject, however, Mr. Statchard waved resolutely aside.

"When you were cooped," the quiet old voice went on, "a piece of paper was found at the back of the yard, on which were the words 'The Young Lady at the Rectory'!"

Theodore maintained a resentful silence.

"Is there a young lady at the Rectory?"

Theodore believed there was.

"You must have been certain, or you would not have obeyed such a summons."

"I could hardly refuse!"

"Now!" concluded Mr. Statchard, and Theodore could feel the uplifted finger in the darkness, "Who would possibly know that?"

Theodore could not conceive. He had the haziest recollections of his abduction, and the fact of a tell-tale piece of paper connecting Marina with it being in such hands as Mr. Statchard's seemed to him most unfortunate, in view of her express desire for privacy. He was therefore very guarded in his further admissions, and glad enough when the lights of Easthampton came in view at a bend in the road. His spirits rose when, after threading streets all hushed in the quiet of Sunday evening, he entered the George Yard, and found that there, at least, the Monday seemed to have begun.

The narrow place was full of bustle, the public rooms full of light, the kitchens made noticeable the advanced state of preparation of the dinner, which was laid in the little Assembly. Mrs. Armes could be heard, stimulating the activities of the servants, while in the yard, Ben and the boys were decorating some harness with buff ribbon. In the passage by the bar, those who had been thirsty all day were remedying the defect. The empty coffee-room, and the room in which the absent "commercial gents" did their writing, were invaded by couples and small groups with buff favours, who had apparently had the most engrossing business to transact, so close were their heads together, so oblivious were they of all that was going on around them. Some of them Theodore vaguely recognised as members of the Ward Committees, or supporters of his, in various grades; others he did not know, and of some he could not help wondering why they were there at all. Apparently they had no such doubts or uncertainties about him, for he found himself completely ignored, and was in fact wondering what part he had to play in all this, when Mr. Statchard sent him to dress, with injunctions not to be long. He had no intention of being long. The teeming life of the place on that winter evening stimulated and interested him, and was in harmony with the reaction he now felt from the hyper-sensitiveness of young love and the delicacy of contact with female personality. He came down again full of keen anticipation

and found Mr. Statchard, who was, of course, perpetually full-dressed, looking for him to take the place on his own right hand at table.

Mr. Statchard who, in private intercourse, had been nothing more than a very self-confident, opinionated and dictatorial little old man, with a voice like the rustling of parchment, and a manner compounded of that of guardian and professional adviser, seemed, in this more public atmosphere, to take on a greater weightiness, a more refined dryness, a levitical authority that far outdid the Rector's mild and gentlemanly priestliness. Seated in the big armchair at the head of the table, he no longer condescended to address individuals, his utterance was public, as:

"Be seated, gentlemen, pray. Mr. Allday will say grace!" There was a hush. Above the double bank of bowed heads no holy words fell like a sprinkle of divine salt on the collation. Mr. Statchard neither moved nor betrayed any emotion. Nor did he attempt to discover the missing dissenter. He uttered one word only:

"Vardigans!"

The clerk dined, so far as he could be said to do so, at a side table, littered with more papers than plates and cutlery, accompanied by others of his kind. He rose, and came swiftly and attentively to his master's side. The lawyer addressed him.

"Where is Mr. Allday?"

"Not back from Evening Service yet, sir."

"Very well. Ask Mr. Ramplingham!"

Vardigans passed to where the big auctioneer was moving his head like some prehistoric animal defending its young, and said a word in the importantly cocked ear. With a hem! and a hah! two stutters and a stumble, the grace was said.

The feast began. A goose confronted Theodore, a haunch of venison opposed it at the other end, half-way down were beef-and-kidney pudding and stewed tongue. Port and sherry were in abundance, while towards the lower end of the table malt liquors prevailed. Theodore inquired for whom was set the place on Mr. Statchard's left, and was told for Lord Carstone.

"His Lordship will be indisposed or detained?"

"La!" replied the lawyer. "We shall not need to bother his Lordship. We can do without!" though what precisely this portended Theodore did not divine.

Mr. Allday now arrived, with one or two of the stricter dissenters, who seated themselves with an apology to the chair. In the main, these drank water, a new and astonishing habit, which struck Theodore, who used it for washing and quenching thirst, but had never associated it with ceremonial occasions. The habit did not impede the party loyalty of those who practised it, and he soon found himself "taking wine" with gentlemen who had none, but whose sentiments were unexceptionable, and whose gestures, if shy and provincial, showed the completest devotion to the cause of which he had become the figure-head.

The tables were cleared and re-set with fruit-tarts and custards, cheese and celery, and soon Mr. Stat-chard was on his feet, making a speech which was chiefly eulogistic of the sentiments known to be held by those present. References to the King and Lord Grey, the Bill and the Candidate, were received with loud applause, the applause of those who dine together and think alike and gain certitude from gregariousness and stimulation.

Very different was the speech of Mr. Allday, who followed. Although showing traces of the fatigue due to a day full of duty, the naive earnestness of the dissenting clergyman commanded perfect silence and grave attention, and Theodore noticed, as he had frequently noticed during his travels, the effect of that obscure sense of guilt present in all crowds. In southern countries it showed itself in the obeisance before gaily-coloured processions and glittering altars; here the processions were of ideas, the altars those homely standards of personal conduct by which the northern towns had thriven. Mr. Allday spoke of Progress as though it were a function of the human body; of Freedom as though it were a spiritual state. He referred to the masses, by which Theodore understood him to mean Plebs, the People, but the term gave a new vision of something that Theodore had dimly seen.

The clearness and authority of the minister were all the more obvious when, after him, Ramplingham arose. So far as Theodore could judge, his only

motive in so doing was to assert a dignity he was conscious he did not possess, but how far he was guided by personal vanity, and how far by reasons connected with business, Theodore was not in a position to determine. After him came others, but now, with the fumes of wine, the steam of food, human exhalation, and the incessant stream of words, outlines began to blur, and the impression Theodore received became mistier. Some of the company, devotees of tobacco, went downstairs to smoke. Subsidiary conversations started among the remaining occupants of the table, the lesser occupants of the side tables, and at the same time some of the servants began furtively to clear away.

From time to time Mr. Statchard rapped the board with the small ivory hammer provided for the purpose, but gradually, what with the number of people who desired his ear privately in a series of whispered asides, and a sort of horse-sense which, Theodore could see, was informing him that it was no longer possible to "hold 'em together," as Theodore might have expressed it to himself, the party disintegrated. None of them left without shaking him warmly by the hand, and it greatly amused him to calculate the varying elements of shyness, snobbery and insobriety that dictated the manner of this salute, and the words accompanying it. Eventually, to avoid being left sitting alone, Mr. Statchard rose with a cough and a settling of the lapels of his coat. His dry voice, upon which no food or drink, sentiment or ar-

gument could produce an inflection, ejaculated:

"Well, young man. Very satisfactory indeed!"

"It seems a successful rally, Mr. Statchard!"

"If they would only do one half what they to-night have said, they would spare me a deal of trouble!"

"You feel that there will be less enthusiasm in the morning?"

"I think they are like restive horses, in a field with a scare-crow. They must be kept moving; if once they are allowed to stop, they will shy, and whatever one does, all will do. Good night!"

With no more ceremony was Theodore left to find his way to his chamber. Long after he had undressed and put out his candle, he lay upon his back listening to the receding sounds, and watching through the crack in the shutters the lowering lights of the busy house. In his head Love and Adventure ran a race. He was fighting an election, and his youth loved the contest. He was wooing the most wonderful woman that had ever existed, and his heart yearned for her. But nature drew down his eyelids and regulated his breathing and expunged reality from the shifting images of his mind, so that he might arise refreshed to a morrow of love and life.

X

The Market Place

THEODORE awoke to a persistent rhythmic and but indifferently harmonious din. Tow-row-row, toot, blare, ran through his semi-conscious moments, forced him up from the depths of healthy slumber, to an uneasy, unwilling wakefulness. Too well, too young, too eager to remain long in any half-sensible condition, he sat up, rubbed his eyes and listened. There was no doubt, it was a band, mainly of brass instruments, vigorous but uncertain. After a few bars, the noise ceased abruptly, an altercation took place; then, at a word of command, there was an instant's silence, and with a yet more simultaneous blast and thump, the uproar began again.

The goodwill and hearty energy of the execution overcame Theodore's undeveloped critical faculty, and the measured vibration quickened his pulse as the rude music stimulated his vitality. He leapt from bed, threw up the window and looked out. There, in the yard, were a score of musicians, cheeks pursed, eyes starting, tapping their feet and nodding their heads in the effort to keep time. Theodore wanted, all at once, to laugh at their grimaces, cheer their enthusiasm, and sing the words. This latter course would have entailed some difficulty, for as he watched, another dispute broke out between the

leader and the small cornet, for whereas the former had bidden them resume "Fortune Favours the Brave," the latter had struck in with "See the Wearer of the Laurel." While the point was being settled, all wind instruments were suspended before lips that joined in the argument, while the drummer, cymbals and carillon dropped their hands in patient resignation. Nor was Theodore sole audience of the debate. Upon the eaves of the opposite wing, the stable cat stood, arching its back and waving its tail. The sparrows that had been circling the chimney-pots came to perch upon the gutter above his head. The fowls that had been so sadly disturbed in their breakfast of droppings, came ducking and pecking forward with imbecile gravity, while the yard dog, that had howled so lugubrious an accompaniment to the music, allowed his voice to trail off into silence, and rested his chin on his paws. The respite was a short one. The difference between the musicians was adjusted as suddenly as only musicians' differences can be. After all, the thing that both desired was to be in the band. That overcame all differences. At a word, all the players became motionless, at another, the noise began again. Theodore was delighted. It whipped his blood. He dressed to measure, and sang the chorus as he adjusted his cravat. Before he could assume his coat, there was a knock at the door, and a voice warned him in broad East Anglian:

"Breakfast's a'waitin'!"

Theodore lost no time in descending to the coffee-room, where he found his principal supporters already doing great deeds with eggs in three different shapes, pickled herring, grilled bones and cold ham.

"Let me advise you," was Mr. Ramplingham's greeting, "to make a good breakfast."

Mr. Statchard's, on the other hand, was a sententious:

"Well, young man, have you slept well?"

Theodore replied thoughtlessly. It was usual with him to sleep well and breakfast stoutly. Mr. Varley, who gave him advice about the viands, was a more sympathetic counsellor. And presently came Mr. Doughty, who had driven from Seaton, and joined them, hungry, flushed with health and early hours, abstemious, devout, capable, founded on a rock of imperturbable credit, in nature as upon 'Change. Theodore marked how he, who need least of all fear what men thought of him, was punctilious to bow his head for a moment's grace before meat.

The room filled fast, and Theodore's appetite was balked of complete satisfaction by the necessity he was under of returning greetings and making acquaintance with persons whom he could hardly identify by name or appearance, but who were presented to his notice by the unerring perspicacity of Mr. Statchard. All the time the music of the band accompanied the repast, and when it suddenly ceased there was a general movement to the windows to ascertain the cause. It was obvious enough. The

band had had to suspend harmony, to allow of the gathering of a posse of horsemen, who filed into the yard, gave over their mounts to Ben and his busy assistants and either joined the breakfast, or hung about the bar, taking an early glass, quizzing, if they dared, Mrs. Armes, but in any case receiving all that they gave, with interest, from the landlady. Seeing the question on Theodore's face, Mr. Statchard hastened to explain.

"Your cavalcade, for the procession!"

Now Theodore saw added men on foot with standards. These with the band passed out of the yard, and were replaced by a dozen of open carriages that filled the place, and could still be seen coming in from the Middens at the back. This was Mr. Statchard's moment, and standing on the steps of the coach office, his hands behind him, he marshalled the procession. Mr. Doughty was to ride with Mr. Varley, Mr. Ramplingham with Mr. Allday, and so forth. The directions were given in that quiet accustomed voice that seemed to be raised no louder than in the owner's office, but which penetrated with its quiet incisiveness the stamping and jingling of the horses, the creaking and grinding of the vehicles, the shouted greetings and conversation. Ben and his men had one ear cocked towards it, and even Mrs. Armes yielded place to the shrivelled old figure in black, as though he had been the Duke of Wellington. Finally, with a dry, "There! Now, young man!" Theodore was motioned to the leading carriage at

the mouth of the yard, and Mr. Statchard mounted with him. The word was passed, the band struck up "See the Conquering Hero!" the horses got a flick or chirrup to set them in motion and the cavalcade proceeded on its way.

When the carriage emerged from the yard into the Market Place, Theodore saw that it was already full. The stalls had all been cleared away, and in the emptiness so left, had been reared two curious wooden erections, separated by the greatest possible distance. Pre-occupied as he was by acknowledging the sporadic cheering that greeted his appearance, he could only think of a pair of scaffolds. But two scaffolds were surely excessive? Here the band did its utmost, the riders waved their canes, the flag-bearers fluttered the Buff flags, and led a very different sort of cheer, a regular sustained and united one that rang against the house fronts and went towering up into the pale mild sky. As, at Mr. Statchard's urgent bidding, Theodore rose, lifted his hat, and bowed to right and left, the scene was plain before him. From each of the neighbouring streets, a throng was pouring into the Market Place, which was beginning to pack. The drab clothes, the sombre shop fronts with dwelling-houses above them, were garish with the Royal Blue that the opposite party affected, or with the Buff colour that was his own. But mixed as the two were, on the houses, and among the newcomers, the tendency in the Market Place itself was for them to become sharply separated, the Buff

colour centring around the mouth of George Yard, and prevailing over the northern and eastern sides of the square, embracing the waterside, professional and industrial quarters of the town. The nearest booth was Buff, but the Moot Hall was strictly neutral, colourless, and away from the southern and western walls of it, the Blue marked around the further booth, every man's coat and hat, most buildings, all conveyances. This colour extended over all the alleys that led up to the Swine Market on Hog Hill, centred upon King's Head Yard, but embraced the whole quarter surrounding St. George's-by-the-Bridewell, and the Castle with its ditches, in fact, all the part of the town dominated by agriculture and land-owning. Here Theodore could see a rival procession in motion, and at any slackening of the din made by his own band and supporters, could discern the throb and vibration, the cheering and trampling of Sir Curtius Hamilton's party.

As that rival noise grew fainter, Theodore perceived that his procession was leaving the Market Place, by Bishopgate, just as the other was going away in the opposite direction by Nether Bargate. A glance at the inscrutable figure at his side convinced him that this was part of a preconceived plan, of a ritual almost. For the crowd in Bishopgate and in Riverside, into which they shortly turned, was of a more motley character, and less segregated as to party than in the Market Place. Here, those with Buff favours joined in the less organised part of the

procession that trailed, a vociferous and unwieldy serpent, behind the carriages, while the Buff garlanded windows fluttered Buff ribbons, fair eyes spied for him, pretty lips smiled and feminine hands waved encouragement. At Mr. Statchard's prompting, whenever the enthusiasm merited recognition, Theodore rose, bowed, bare-headed, and even led the cheering by vigorous waving of his hat. He soon took to the work, his blood danced, the noise, the gregarious vitality went to his head like wine, he had rarely enjoyed himself more except in the hunting-field. He evolved for himself, impromptu, what he felt to be a broad, hail-fellow-well-met manner for the masculine crowd about him, a more courtly behaviour for the fair sex above.

Now they crossed over into Dog Lane, the patches of Blue, if no more common, were rougher and harsher in manner. Groups of the antagonistic colour stood to groan and boo at him, while he sat close-lipped and frowning, his bellicose instincts aroused. He suddenly became aware of the other aspect of so public a display of partisan feeling. He could not retaliate, he could only outface those who were against him. The depth and certainty of his feeling were revealed to him by a stiffness in the cheeks, a soreness of the forehead, that resulted from smiling so assiduously, frowning with so much intention. The world had become divided for him, into Buff and Blue, the faces of the crowd, its voice, were not those of human beings, but of Buffs and Blues. So by Northgate,

more crowded than ever, the procession, unwieldy and becoming unmanageable, came back to the Market Place. The band blowing and banging with renewed vigour, swerved to one side. The mounted gentlemen made a half circle, and before the ancient portico of the Moot Hall, the carriages drew up, and their occupants descended and entered the building. Theodore did as Mr. Statchard bade him in dumb show. The noise was by now deafening, and the sudden darkness and quiet of the Moot Hall, with its thick walls and woodwork shining with ancient use, made so sharp a contrast that Theodore walked along a passage and up some stairs, as though stunned by silence. Statchard and Ramplingham exchanged a few observations, as if they might have been at a play or spectacle, in a matter-of-fact tone that struck Theodore as singularly cold-blooded:

“Blue is before us?”

“They have the lesser round!”

“The Mayor will not be heard.”

“That is not unusual.”

Feeling as though Blue being before him should have been a matter for deeper feeling, the inaudibility of the Mayor, a matter of greater concern, Theodore was motioned to step out of a low window, and found himself on the leaded top of the portico. He was not alone. His supporters pressed behind him, the Mayor, with the civic officers in attendance, came forward to meet him, beyond them he was conscious of the figure of Sir Curtius Hamilton, supported by

a dozen of adherents bowing above the balustrade. The Mayor bowed and mumbled, Mr. Statchard gave him a slight push, and he stepped up to the balustrade. Fortunately his head was good, for the rail was a low one and the drop more than twenty feet. And there came to meet him, like a great wave rushing up the Market Place, and bursting against the portico, a roar of welcome and dismissal, of encouragement and defiance. All over that enclosed space, every eye and mouth was open and directed at him. He had heard cheering around him before, had felt himself the object of scrutiny, but not as here, coming from below, up to him, alone. He drew himself up, put his left hand on his hip, and bowed. The sound went a tone higher, then dwindled and sank. And a queer thought came into his head. This must be like what the condemned feel on the scaffold. The same height, isolation, momentary importance. The same fickle beast-of-many-heads below there, declaring its will. He suddenly felt an aloofness, a detachment, almost a contempt for all these people, supporters and detractors alike. Then Mr. Statchard touched him, and he stepped back, feeling as though he had passed through an initiation.

The Mayor had come forward now and was reading something from a paper, assisted by his clerk. The bellman rang his bell, the chief agents on either side motioned with their hands for silence. It was useless. The noise of the crowd sank, but only to a certain level, and remained there, seething and bub-

bling. The Mayor did not look like a condemned man. He looked like one of the battered figures of saints that topped the flying buttresses of the Cathedral. He was just as animated, as effective, as audible. Finally, with a motion of the hands to right and left, as if to indicate the two candidates, he rolled up his paper, gave it to the clerk and withdrew. He was an old man, unused to such exertion, and looked dazed and as if desiring support as he shuffled to the window and stepped in. There was a brief murmuring of ironical courtesy between Stat-chard and the Blue agent, and Sir Curtius Hamilton and his party descended first. He now saw that something besides etiquette had dictated that while the Blue carriages had drawn up on the southern side of the Moot Hall, his own people were awaiting on the northern. He could feel, like the effect upon the weather of an electrical discharge, the result of the brief ceremony that had just taken place. His partisans and those of the Blue must now be kept separate. He could see here, better even than from above, how the gutter from the pump at the corner, running diagonally right across the Market Place to the junction of Regent's Parade, with Nether Bargate, separated the two parties, and how scrupulous all were to observe it. Voices were rising or deepening. The level tones of mere conversation no longer conveyed what men felt. Shouts of defiance and muttered threats were now the only means of expression. He mounted into his carriage, although

the journey was not over a hundred yards, for it would have been difficult even for his own side to have made way for him. So he arrived at the George, in the peace and shelter of the high-walled yard, dismounted and was grateful to Mrs. Armes, who insisted that he should drink a glass of hock and Seltzer water. He was not allowed to finish this in peace. Vardigans came to inform him that he was required upstairs.

He found himself in a large bed-sitting-room, cleared for the purpose, from the window of which a complete view of the Market Place could be obtained. Vardigans' words, "They want you to show yourself!" had made no clear impression. On stepping to the window, however, he was the object of a new ovation. It was a bow window, above the entrance to the yard. As he was seen, there issued from the entry a compact body of his colour, composed of his nominators, and those who had made up the procession, who advanced on a determined fashion towards the Buff booth, where the presiding officer now sat, with his clerk, to open the poll. By dint of force, and the effects of lusty shouts of "Make way there!" they were able to reach it. But amid his preoccupation, Theodore could not help noticing that not the stoutest elbows or loudest voices made so speedy a path open before them as did the quiet determination of Mr. Statchard's slight and wizened figure. Here he seemed to catch a clue to the great and new problem about him — the real

inner feelings and desires of this collective man, voter, citizen, at once his supporter or his opponent. The individuals who filled the Market Place were by no means so foolish as their boisterous surging seemed to show. They gave way to Mr. Statchard's assumption of power, they welcomed Mr. Varley's benevolence, but when shoved or ordered, they stood their ground, shoved back or argued. And Theodore shared their feelings. Did he not obey the lawyer, like the connoisseur merchant, and the banker, and resent the clumsier, more direct attempt to handle him?

The great game, as he felt it to be, was now started in earnest. What with the absence of Statchard, and the secluded position he occupied, Theodore had actually leisure to look on, and watch his own election proceeding. His feelings towards it had changed, were still changing, would, he felt, change further. Initial astonishment, excitement, anticipation had left him. Like the swimmer, he looked back upon the poise, the dive, the shock of cold water. He was now in mid-stream. From theories about the way in which his fellow creatures lived, the mere observations of an onlooker, he was gaining the most practical experience of how they governed themselves. There, opposite to him, beside one booth, Mr. Statchard had emerged. The clerk asked a question, there was a reply in dumb show, then a roar of cheering. It was most of all like some of those elaborate mechanical toys he had seen in Ger-

many. Now came the turn of Ramplingham, Varley, Doughty, Allday and the rest. The Buff crowd swirled about this booth; hats and arms, raised and lowered as if by mechanical device, were agitated. A similar commotion embraced the other booth, away over in the further part of the Market Place. Now here were Statchard and the others coming back. They received a long-drawn, hoarse ovation, down all the hundred yards of pushing and making way. Behind them, the same noisy pantomime was going on, less clear cut as the lesser men took the place of the leader. Theodore watched it all, fascinated, until he became aware of Mr. Statchard, standing beside him. Anxiously he turned to his adviser.

"How is it going?" He heard the eagerness in his own voice.

"Suppose we take some luncheon!" was all the answer.

Luncheon accordingly they took. Theodore was more hungry than he had noticed. Once seated before an ample plateful of giblet pie, he had no leisure to inquire as to the fortunes of the contest for some minutes. When he did so interrupt his eating, it was to bury his face deep in the big pewter that Mrs. Armes had so thoughtfully provided, filled to the brim with the strongest brew of the national beverage. No long period of such treatment could fail to make him forget a certain fatigue and a growing bewilderment that arose, not so much from inability

to understand what was going on in and around him, as from the impossibility of seizing and appreciating the innumerable small incidents of the eventful day. Just as he found it impossible to do justice equally to Mrs. Armes' pickled walnuts, and to her samphire, so he failed to catch what Mr. Varley was saying to Mr. Doughty on one side of him, and also to understand the drift of the word or two of brief comment and report which the indefatigable Vardigans, who was hardly in his chair for five consecutive minutes, kept bringing to his master from the yard, the bar or the first-floor front. Theodore even went so far as to ask:

"Pray, Mr. Statchard, have we made a good start?"

"Excellent!" was the reply, "the members of the Buff party are voting Buff, those of the Blue, only, are voting Blue!"

Snubbed, he retired into himself. Rumours kept invading the comparative quiet of the coffee-room, bouts of cheering, shouting, the tramp of men and horses, exclamations of spectators, excited reports of those who came in from the contest, adieux of those who were departing. As he sat relishing an excellent Stilton, with a stalk of fresh celery, he heard Mr. Doughty approach the agent. The quiet seriousness of the banker's voice claimed far more attention than many a louder one.

"Where is His Lordship?"

"I have not seen him!"

"Are you not surprised?"

"Mr. Doughty, I am never surprised at anything!"

"But surely his interest is valuable to us?"

"I will see that it is!"

The two men faced each other. The contrast between them was striking. The banker, much the younger, had the grave, square face that seemed moulded by the responsibilities of his calling, but which was yet redeemed from heaviness by the frank expression of one who never needed to dissemble, the engaging simplicity of assured power and position, the healthy habit of leisured life and sporting pursuit. To him, a word was a bond. Lord Carstone was due, as a bill might be due. He was mentally marking the nobleman "no effects." Opposite to him, old, tortuous, profoundly cynical, the lawyer had equally impressed upon his parchmenty indoor lineaments, his long years of knowing that which he would not admit, seeing what was round the corner, assuming the worst possibilities of human nature, but without prejudice. He won. The banker gave a brief, hearty laugh, dismissed the matter with a "Very well, then!" and left the table talking with Mr. Varley of other things. Mr. Statchard talked to no one. He wiped his mouth, as if to conceal the fact that he had lunched, went upstairs, and seated at the side table, conferred with Vardigans. Other committee men, ward officials of the party, individuals to whom Theodore found it in some cases diffi-

cult to assign any particular place or character, were now drifting about the room. He knew little of the small shopkeeping or handicraft classes, had seen them as a schoolboy, at the home farm, and the Rectory, but his now immensely sharpened perceptions failed to connect this or that nervously pompous, or shyly tongue-tied citizen, dressed in Sunday best and brief importance, with the glib and complaisant persons who had been summoned to make for him, this or that, to do some small job at one or other of his successive homes. He felt bound to shake hands with them, and did so, but was unable to determine whether that were too little, or too much, from the confusion or loquacity he caused. There was also all that newish industrial class with whom, naturally, he had never been in contact, and there was a whole world of the professions, who clearly expected to be known and treated with varying, but by them perfectly understood, degrees of intimacy or deference. He became lost in a forest of damp hands, mumbling mouths, eyes that seemed to look to him for something he was unprepared to give because he did not know what it was, and ears evidently tuned to hear what he would say, which, in his inexpertness could seldom exceed inquiries as to how they did and hopes for the weather. He was therefore as much taken aback as relieved when Mr. Statchard, with what were, in the old lawyer's uneffusive way, marks of approbation, motioned him to retire into the small adjoining chamber in which he had now established

with Vardigans a sort of temporary and private office.

The polling, which had been perceptibly slower during the dinner-time, was becoming brisker. Men kept coming to the door, respectfully, to give the latest news. He caught the figures — four hundred and six, Buff, four hundred and sixty-one, Blue. Involuntarily his face fell, but Vardigans was reassuring:

“Many of our people can’t get there, until they leave their work. We shall do better this evening.”

“But surely that fact is as much in the favour of the other side?” Vardigans shook his head.

“A lot of their people never did any work.”

“Persons of a certain position?”

“And persons of no position at all!”

“Is the poll then open indefinitely?”

“At the discretion of the returning officers. They dare not close too soon for fear of ill-feeling, and cannot close too late, or they would get neither food nor sleep.”

“A hazardous and trying occupation!”

“Lord, Mr. Carston, that’s nothing. There are men in the tan-yards that do worse jobs than that. The returning officers and their clerks’ jobs, are eagerly sought. They think a good deal of themselves!”

“Do they?”

“Why, yes, to-day they’re somebody. Generally they’re nobody!” and turning to a figure at the door: “What is it, Mr. Ramplingham?”

"Er — Mr. Statchard —— ?" the indecisive nervous chairman faltered.

"He's gone out. Let you know when he's back!"

Theodore admired the brisk assurance of the young clerk, the nearest to his own age of the personnel of the Buff management, his respectful familiarity with his difficult master, his alert intelligence in affairs. He listened, interested and convinced.

"You should have seen Ramplingham when last election fell in the year of his mayoralty!"

"He felt the position onerous?"

"He had to change his shirt!"

"Did he?"

"He did. Things will warm up presently and you'll see what it's like! At present we are only polling the regular party men who could find their way to the booth blindfold. But there are a number of electors who are thinking!"

"They need convincing arguments!" Theodore surmised, deeply interested.

"Well, some of them lack the means of getting to the poll."

"They might be influenced, I suppose, by the views of the person who provided the means!"

"They might!" answered Vardigans, looking him straight in the eye.

"But beyond that ——" continued Theodore, to whom the look seemed a covert allusion to practices he had heard of, indistinctly realised, but found not merely half-comprehensible, but paltry.

"Mr. Statchard will try persuasion!" and here Vardigans rose as though disinclined to be more precise. He had an excellent reason (or excuse) for breaking off the conversation. Ben the ostler had put his cropped head in at the door. There was a note for Vardigans, who took from the table that constituted his desk, a note-book, on the cover of which Theodore caught sight of the words "Lord C's tenants," murmured an apology and left him. He sat, rather disconsolate, inclined to feel that this dismantled bed-chamber was the real candidate for election more than himself. He was roused by Ramplingham, who knocked with ceremony, and rather pompously requested that he would come and show himself. Hastily touching his cravat and straightening his coat, he advanced to the window, and showed himself in the chill draught made by the wide-flung sash.

The scene below had changed again. The rumours he had heard had meant a gradual refilling of the Market Place, and he was conscious in a moment, that even if refilled with identically the same persons, the mood had altered. There was more elbowing across the gutter that divided the two parties, there were little quarrelsome eddies in the crowd, and the cheering and booing that saluted his appearance were punctuated by the shouting or rather barking of epithets. He could not make out the drift of these, but was as aware of this difference as he might have been, if from a boat he had seen the smooth swell

criss-crossed with a gusty rising breeze. As he bowed, and he took pains to bow repeatedly and emphatically against the now tempestuous acclamation, he saw emerging from the entry of the yard beneath him, a compact body of men, who differed from the Buff phalanx that had opened the poll in that, while those had stepped assuredly, with an almost righteous certitude to record their votes, these seemed to be shepherded by Vardigans, various ward men whom he was just learning to know by sight, and other men who appeared, as it were, in charge of them. They stepped less certainly, and came to a halt by the booth ringed with cheering Buff, while such of the Blue section as could see what was afoot added yells of so blood-curdling an animosity as to make it clear that something unusual was afoot. Then came a sudden deathly silence, in which could be heard plain as a chiming clock in the night hours, the voice of the returning officer:

“How do you vote?”

“Occupier.”

“What parish?”

“St. George’s!”

There was a searching, a verification on a list, and
“For whom do you vote?”

“Carston!”

The word was audible, and it was the last; a triumphant frenzy seemed to make the Buff crowd rise as boiling stew rises in a pot. The Blue crowd retaliated with a yell of execration. From the junc-

tion of these two waves of sound leapt a third, the crash of the Buff band, that seemed literally to burst with "Rule Britannia" as if to ravish melody, and murder the very faculty of hearing. Another tenant and another voted, and were half carried, half pushed, with slaps dealt upon their backs that would have felled an ox, and valedictions that would have deafened a post, hurled in their faces. Some embroilment seemed inevitable, but at that moment there was a gust of cheering, a blare of brass from the King's Head. The figure of Sir Curtius Hamilton was discernible upon the balcony of the Blue inn, and his supporters turned to him, leaving the Buffs unmolested and half ignored, to greet their champion loud and long. This enabled Theodore to retire and seek the shelter and quiet of the room, where he found Mr. Statchard.

He looked half appealingly at the lawyer, hoping to hear that all was going well and that he himself had done what was demanded by the situation, or to express his willingness to do more if only he knew what it might be. The look he had in reply was enigmatic. He took the newspaper the old man was holding out. It was the *Tribune*, the Blue organ. It was folded back. He did not at first discover anything of importance. There was a leader presaging the dire calamities that would be involved by the passage of the Bill. The next thing he saw was a stanza concluding:

“ Britons, arise, exert your righteous will,
That never shall dark Anarchy’s sons . . .
Flock to the poll, defeat the accursed Bill.”

He looked further down and came upon a paragraph:

“While reprobating in the strongest terms, the display of violence that so unfortunately mars the dignified exercise of political duties, we feel bound to protest against the capital which is being made out of the recent escapades of Mr. Theodore Carston, Reform Candidate for this city. Contrary to what he had been led to expect by the statements appearing in our contemporary, we learn from the lips of the gentleman himself, that he suffered nothing worse than a journey by water. For this he was recompensed, during his return, which was over land, by the company of the lady who plays Seraphine in ‘The Feeling Heart’ at the Royal Theatre this week, and who, on account of an accident to the conveyance in which she was travelling, was obliged to ask of him such a favour. It remains to be seen if the noble patron who has so graciously presented Mr. Carston with the subservient votes at his command will be equally pleased.”

When Theodore read these words he was at first nonplussed, then incredulous, and finally indignant. From feeling curiosity he came to feel insult. The longer he held the news-sheet in his hand, staring at

but not re-reading the words, the stronger grew his resentment. The word "Outrage!" sprang to his lips. To lose something of his identity, to become not merely Theodore Carston, but an impersonal being called a candidate, to stand as such, not merely before a committee to be considered, but before a mob to be stared at, he could condone. But to be held up in print to the contempt and ridicule of that wider, less distinct, more critical mob, the readers of a newspaper, struck him as an act of exposure of nakedness, that made him vociferate "Indecent!" as he strode up and down the little room. His anger and mortification were too stormy and sharp to be left unassuaged; he turned to Mr. Statchard and demanded:

"Well, what can be done about it?"

Mr. Statchard was not listening, not looking at him. He was methodically turning over the pages of one of the numerous registers that Vardigans kept so competently. At the tone of Theodore's question, one in which questions were not often addressed to any one so old and established, he only vouchsafed:

"That depends!"

"Depends upon what?"

"Whether it is true."

"The facts, distortedly. The inference ——" he fumed a moment and then cried, "I wish I could lay hands on the rascal."

"You would soon prove the inference, in the public eye!"

Theodore flung the paper away from him, in his exasperation. The fellow who had been so glib and friendly belonged, of course, to the Blue paper.

"Must I suspect every one who speaks to me?" he cried.

"It would be wiser!" came the old man's reply.

"And the lady in the case, has she no reparation?"

"I should wager she has received it by now!"

"What? Do you believe she was set on to play this part?"

"As like as not! Where did you set her down?"

"At the Moot Hall Inn — the place with the cock-pit!"

Mr. Statchard nodded twice with his mouth open.

"Who met her there?"

"Well, I thought it was Ogle, His Lordship's man!"

Here Mr. Statchard only said, "Aha!" and closed his mouth. The interjection might mean anything.

"What do you infer from that?"

"That explains it!"

A dozen surmises rushed through Theodore's mind. Must he now suspect Ogle, His Lordship? Why not Mr. Statchard himself, who sat there so complacent?

"What does it explain?"

"His Lordship!"

"He did not set a trap for me!"

"He may have made an appointment with the lady."

Theodore was bound to admit that this might be the case, and could hardly be objected to. Was this the cause of His Lordship's absence? And with less heat and certitude he asked again:

"Well, what can be done? Have we a right of action, or shall I horsewhip the writer?"

Mr. Statchard shook his head from side to side. Without looking at Theodore he turned to Vardigans, who had not ceased book-keeping and listing during the conversation:

"Is Mr. Doughty here?"

Vardigans left them and returned quickly with the banker. Theodore quite expected to see if not anger, at least disgust, or at lowest, concern, on the face of the man of credit. But he appeared merely his usual grave, competent and serviceable self.

"Three hundred!" Mr. Statchard uttered.

Mr. Doughty took a pen, and a slip of paper that Vardigans hastily found for him, wrote a sentence and signed it, handing it to the clerk.

"Mind," he added seriously, "that you see our Mr. Dormer in person."

"Of course!" Vardigans was gone as if so accustomed to the errand that instructions were unnecessary. Behind the banker, Varley had made his appearance, and a waiter with candles.

"Is that all?" asked Mr. Doughty.

"That will do for to-night," replied the lawyer. "Vardigans and I will attend to the details."

"Then come with me," Mr. Varley bade Theodore.

"You will have seen enough of all this for one day. You must be revolted, in fact. It is now dark enough for you to accompany me home unobserved. I may be able to offer you some little distraction!"

Theodore went with him thankfully enough.

XI

The Club

SLIPPING out by the Middens, they took to the unlighted Castle Ditches and gained Riverside. All here was silent, deserted. Behind them, across the ridges of the roofs, rose the subsiding murmur of the Market Place, as, after a Channel storm, the sea still reverberates in the clear morning. The merchant's house was the very haven that Theodore craved after the excitements of the day, the agitation caused by the newspaper. The monk-like servant appeared to have spent the afternoon anticipating his master's return. They had hardly glanced at some Russian Church vestments that Mr. Varley had been able to procure through his agents, when they were bidden to table, where, in their golden skins, pheasants lay awaiting them, while between the silver candlesticks stood baskets containing old encrusted bottles of Burgundy, in which, dim, but rich, could be seen lurking the crimson gleam of many a year's silent meditation, in the darkness, stillness, and even temperature of Mr. Varley's cellars. Theodore responded instantly to such an urging. He had always been led to suppose that if beef and beer are the support of England's toilers, game and the grape are the prerogatives of her gentry. He was soon able to see the fatigues and

irritations of the day in a philosophic light, to smile at them and treat them with the easy demeanour that a gentleman should show towards the varieties of human experience, which cannot be avoided and equalised, and which it is the final test of good manners to take as they come. Mr. Varley was among those who had adopted the new and more enlightened regimen of the table, that had come with the reopening of Europe to travel and commerce. He had left far behind those customs of the eighteenth century which had rendered it obligatory to stuff a guest with puddings and soak him in port. He offered merely a glass of the very best, and then, instead of attempting to prolong the feast, he allowed just time for a taste of the Italian cheese, the curious preserved fruits, and upon the second glass rose, saying:

“I have to preside at a meeting of a private Club this evening. If you would accompany me, it would give me great pleasure, and might be of considerable advantage to your candidature!”

Theodore assented. He could not have refused any proposal of Mr. Varley's. He had a momentary feeling that he ought to ask Mr. Statchard if his attendance at the Club might have any bad effects, so strongly was he coming under the domination of the lawyer. But the Burgundy was bold, Mr. Varley amiable, his own spirits revived and his curiosity insatiable. He buttoned himself closely in his surtout, turning up the collar, although the night was fine. It was, in fact, because the night was so clear that

Mr. Varley thought it inadvisable that they should run much risk of being recognised. They crossed Bishopgate, and turned into a network of alleys that Theodore would have found impenetrable. The tense excitement, and close crowding of the day had died down and dispersed. Inside the innumerable inns, taverns and beer-houses of the old town, a subdued continuous murmur of voices and shuffling of feet could be heard, as though in those low, packed rooms, humanity were simmering over a fire of conviviality, blown by argumentativeness.

Only here and there were sounds of altercation and strife, while the rare groups at the street corners were composed of those whose interest in the election was more serious, who had appointments to keep, persons to see, instructions to give and take. Such at least was their appearance or manner, and Theodore fancied he recognised more than one of the ward officials who had worked so assiduously under Vardigans and waited so obediently for a look or a word from Mr. Statchard. Among such people, along such streets, with squat gables unusually dignified against the moonlit sky, and undistinguished fronts suddenly solemn in the deep shadow, Theodore followed his friend, philosopher and guide, well-being in his limbs and repose in his heart. They came out in the Market Place, slipped behind the Moot Hall, and turned into a yard that pierced the western frontage of the space, and which Theodore dimly recognised as Cockle Row.

Here Mr. Varley stopped before a low wooden door and rapped upon it, in peculiar cadence, which Theodore conceived to be some sort of signal. The only answer was a click, and for some seconds it was not clear that this was not the unbolting of the door, but the sliding back of the cover of a spy-hole, heart-shaped, and blocked by a grating of curious design. Finally some reflection of the moonlight above enabled Theodore to make out the pallor of a human face behind the ironwork, and a voice inquired —

“Who knocks?”

Mr. Varley gave some muttered password, too low to be clearly caught.

“Who follows, brother?” came the voice again.

Again Mr. Varley was inaudible. But as the door opened, he gave Theodore one end of his cudgel to hold, and keeping the other, led forward into total darkness. A low beam struck Theodore’s hat from his head, and as he recovered it, something caught his toe and tripped him up. He manfully clung to the cudgel, and found himself blundering up steep wooden stairs that twisted more than once, but at the top of which he could feel that he stood upon an upper landing.

He was suddenly blindfolded, shoved, and uncovered, and for a moment could see nothing in the blaze of light. Then as his sense of sight returned, he found himself in a high and spacious room, with a raftered roof above his head and a great old window of ecclesiastical design hung with thick, untidy cur-

tains. One wall was filled by a huge hearth in which a fire blazed in an iron basket of odd shape, and above the chimney-piece hung printed and written notices, lists and effusions. At a small table near the door a man, who wore some sort of insignia, was doing something with money and a book. Other members of the Society, of whom one or two wore a badge or sash, were dispersed about the room. Mr. Varley was treated with consideration, and, Theodore thought, was readily welcome. The Reverend Mr. Allday, who shortly followed, seemed also well known and expected. Theodore was asked to step into another room, a dusty and little used lean-to, whence, after a few minutes of kicking his heels, he was formally recalled.

He found the brethren now disposed in a semi-circle round the fire, their finery removed, while from a hatch one of their number was dispensing pewter mugs of porter, and from a cupboard in the wall, long churchwarden pipes bearing each its owner's name. Mr. Allday alone remained with his fine, thin lips unsoiled. Theodore was no votary of the weed, but by a judicious blowing and sucking, managed to keep alight his pipe. He found the taste most disagreeable, and had frequent recourse to the malt liquor. Perhaps it was as well, for, after certain formalities, a member rose to read some observations he had written down, upon "The Power of Steam and its Effect upon Human Destiny."

Theodore listened with attention, now inclined to

protest angrily, now inclined to laugh at the mispronunciations and faults of syntax which he detected in the address. He contained himself, rather, from a feeling of wonder. For there was in the speaker more than in the words he uttered an element which was strange to Theodore. The man was marked as a manual worker, not merely by his obvious lack of practice in thought and expression, but by his big, gnarled hands and stout if stunted frame. It had never before occurred to Theodore that such a one could have any power of personal expression, or rather class expression of a point of view which aimed at dissociating itself from the natural leaders of the nation, persons of power, wealth and education, and seemed rather to envisage a community not only composed of, but self-governed by, manual workers. The half-coherent and frequently bitter sentences all contained the assumption that the new invention must and should be used for the diminution if not the extinction of the drudgery of labouring men. This outlook was acrimoniously put forward as though an attempt were being made to rob of their birthright a class of the population who could never, unaided, have conceived so material an advance in civilisation as the manipulation of steam power seemed to promise.

The high acrid voice ceased and the speaker sat down. There was a silence in which men could be heard drinking or puffing at their pipes, while the very rafters of the roof seemed to listen for yet an-

other echo. No one spoke. Some seemed to be thinking, "Well, what do you think of that?" and others, "Well, what do we think of that?" At length Mr. Varley rose, and Theodore noticed a movement among those present of subdued satisfaction, but whether because his friend was generally liked, or because of the soothing and pleasant sound of his cultured and moderate voice, Theodore did not know. He had expected Mr. Varley to put the last speaker decisively in his place. If this was Mr. Varley's intention, the execution of it was far more subtle and roundabout than Theodore anticipated. Mr. Varley began by likening the invention of steam in the domain of physical force to that of the printing press in the mental activities of mankind, and showed how all such comparatively sudden increases in human power eluded the grasp of the worker at the bench or in the field and were bound to favour the classes of the privileged and leisured. The printed word was still the prerogative of those who directed or owned, and only touched here and there those who delved and span. And how could the event be otherwise until, by education, the humbler ranks were enabled to fit themselves to grasp the power that was actually the heritage of all members of the human race, without distinction of age or sex, race or kind. Mr. Varley controlled his voice and kept his gestures within a nice moderation. Theodore could not but admire the air he had, not so much of informing, as of persuading, the brethren. They seemed to take it very

calmly, some as if hypnotised by the gentle voice and simple logic, others kept dumb by bewilderment. Some slept, or kept themselves from sleeping by regular puffs of smoke, and draughts of porter.

The silence, this time, did not last so long. Mr. Allday arose, no louder than Mr. Varley, but using obvious authority rather than persuasion. Addressing the Club formally by the collective name "Brethren of the Cresset," he adjured them to recollect their symbol of unity, which was also their symbol of faith. The purpose of the Cresset was to throw light into dark places. But mere light, in itself, was but an abstract phenomenon. Behind it, actuating it, was the omnipotence and omniscience of Almighty God. Let them use the Light, therefore, while rendering thanks to the Giver.

During the whole of this quiet, but forcibly delivered exhortation, Theodore experienced mixed and contradictory feelings. Brought up as he had been in the lap, as it were, of the Established Church, he found it difficult to admit Mr. Allday's right to so striking an assumption of authority while admitting its genuine forcefulness. He noticed that any allusion to the mysteries of Religion held the attention of the listeners better than any appeal to the reasoning faculty. And while he was turning these conflicting considerations in his mind, the brethren seemed to awake to a more lively interest and immediate activity, but how much of this was due to the fact that the more educated and distinguished members

of the gathering had now spoken, leaving the field clear to lesser personalities, and how much to porter, or to the galvanic action of words, he had not time to decide. Mr. Allday had hardly reseated himself than two or three were on their feet together, and would have begun speaking at once, had not the more powerful voice and assertive manner of an ill-conditioned-looking individual, of thin bent figure, pale face, and prominent aggressive features, beaten the others by loudness of tone and flow of language.

"It seems to me like this 'ere," he vociferated, "the Ancients, as we have often times bin told, by them that has more book-larnin' than me, divided the world into fower helements — animal, vegetable, mineral and 'bustible. Now, we have the 'uman body, which is hanimal, in a manner of speaking, the bones which is mineral, the hair of the body which is vegetable — that's why the gentry dips their brushes into water when they does their 'air to water it and make it grow — and 'bustible, which is fire, smoke and likewise steam. Now, if you foller me, when we imitate to use the power of steam, we have all fower elements, we become little universes ourselves. An', depend upon it, we shall not stop there. Where are the universes? Why, in the 'Eavens. An' if we take to ourselves the power o' steam, we shall shoot up and become stars in the firmament, by the force of helevation. And, if you will allow me, I will say that we shall then find that Brother Varley is as right as Reverend Brother Allday, and likewise Brother

Bridgefoot, as have spoken, we shall have Light and Power, and Liberty all at once, altogether!"

This outburst was greeted not with amusement or disgust, as Theodore felt sure it would be. On his clean palate, sensitive to the ill-bred and the unlettered coarseness of the harangue, it produced the effect of food half-cooked and allowed to go sour. But he soon made up his mind that those who knew better would be careful to conceal their feelings, while the majority of the brethren would be impressed by the delivery of the speech, but incapable of criticising its matter. Then, while they gaped and murmured, there arose yet another man, grey-haired, but with that perennial youthfulness in the bright eye and sanguine complexion which can only come from the determined spirit and clear-burning fire within: this speaker, to his own satisfaction at least, overturned all that had previously been set up. "What benefit," he cried, "can any of us hope to derive from the increase in material power, unless we have a better distribution of the results of human labour? Brother Varley is right, the good that the discovery of steam might do to mankind, would be kept for the benefit of the few. Reverend Brother Allday is right. It is not in such inventions, but in something else above them, that lies man's only hope of escape from his lowly and laborious existence. Brother Bridgefoot is too hopeful, so is Brother Mayes. The only thing to do is to stifle the inventor in his own steam, break up his engines and return to cultivating

the soil by hand as our fathers did. Then, like so many of them, we shall be sure to starve in a short time and be forgotten, which is perhaps the happiest and most natural fate of the human creature."

This speech had at least the merit of assisting Theodore to find out what he himself thought, and that his thoughts stood ready marshalled in the most uncompromising hostility to those of the last speaker. He would have started to his feet of his own accord, had not Mr. Varley raised a hand for silence and interposed:

"Brother Lollard has brought the discussion to a point at which we may fittingly hear a visitor whom we have with us to-night, Mr. Carston, one of the candidates for Parliament!"

At this there was a murmur blended of anticipation and dissent. Of this, Theodore recked nothing, but rose, and contained himself with all the dignity he could muster, and which he felt due to his position. He began by thanking the brethren for the privilege he had been allowed to enjoy and proceeded, warming:

"With much that I have heard to-night, I must hesitate to disagree; but it is natural that my thoughts run rather aside from the course of this debate. The power of steam, whence derived and how utilised, depends surely on the spirit of the possessors and users. The spirit should be that of English Liberty, the cause which I am determined to champion, if I am elected to represent you in Parliament — more,

which I ask you to elect me, to extend. The Bill which I shall, if I am the man of your choice, support with all my power, will put even more of the men of Easthampton in possession of the right to determine the tenor of their own lives, to promote the increasing welfare of their children, and to set at defiance those corrupt and effete methods of legislation which, happily rare in this our country, are still all too stubborn an obstacle to the realisation of that perfect and equal Freedom which is the dream of every true-born Englishman, the heritage of the citizens of this borough and the hope of Europe. Returning, as I have recently done, from countries less blest, it is my greatest hope to put at the disposal of every free-born and worthy inhabitant of this city, that power to fend for his own good, which is that of the public, that I may be pardoned for describing as the steam of public life, the motive energy of our glorious constitution!"

He stopped, breathless, and sat down. There was unmistakable applause, and there came to Theodore in a flash of inspiration, the thought that what most of them desired more than anything else, was to be told what to do. Whether because of the fervour with which he had spoken, or the sharpness of contrast with the preceding utterance, his few sentences seemed to sort out the faces of the brethren, according to their comprehension. There were faces that understood and approved, faces that did not understand but approved of the sound of words

rather than no sound, and faces that were and always would be opposed to whatever they heard. But to the last, perhaps most of all, it was necessary to be told what to do in quite unmistakable terms. Thus he had attracted and held attention, and wondered what would happen next.

The next thing that did happen was that a brother whom he did not know, but to whom he saw Mr. Varley make some unobtrusive signal, moved that the meeting be now closed. There was some dissent, but the motion was carried, Theodore was again immured in the lean-to closet, while some concluding rite was performed. Then down the stairs he was led in perfect darkness, into the dark yard and out into the now quiet and sombre streets, where only an occasional group, tipsily circulating in the glow of some window, broke the silence, or a gleam of cloudy moonlight varied the obscurity.

Mr. Varley left him at the entry to the George, the big gate of which was opened for him by Ben the ostler. He had not gone many steps down the yard before the voice of Mrs. Armes assailed his ears as, leaning from her conning tower, that corner of the Snug that jutted into the yard, she turned upon him her faculty for management that an evening of warm gin and prolonged argument had fortified.

"Come along now, Mr. Carston, I've been waiting half this evening to tell them gals to take the warming-pan out of your bed. You ought to ha' been between the sheets and asleep this half-hour. You've

got a long day before you again to-morrow, but I suppose you're like all young men, want to burn the candle at both ends, don't you ——" and so with many a saw and admonition, and in a tone of familiarity that contrasted strongly with the prim obsequiousness she displayed in the morning, she bustled him upstairs.

In truth, he could have dispensed with it. He was warm and content. The fatigue and bewilderment of the day had left him. Mr. Varley's unspoken approval, and the way the meeting of the Brotherhood of the Cresset had been concluded immediately upon his speech, filled him with contentment. His education was indeed proceeding apace. He now felt that he was reaching the ear of the body politic in a way that he never seemed to do through the official ordering of Mr. Statchard. He did not turn twice in his bed before he was asleep.

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Theodore woke unaided, to a morning which was grey and gusty. No band was playing, but from the Market Place came a continually growing murmur. On dressing and going down, he found Mr. Statchard at breakfast, imperturbable, with papers beside him and Vardigans within earshot. On inquiring as to the prospects of the day, he got the reply:

"There will be much disturbance!"

"We are polling a more violent section of the electorate?"

“We are polling the reluctant and the reflective!”

From his station in the upper room, Theodore surveyed the scene. There was no greater crowd and less show and formality than on the previous day. The clerks were already in the polling-booths, and about those edifices stood groups, with their heads close together, their eyes every way. An individual or two, detached and alone, would be seen making his way across the cobbles uncertainly, glancing at the booths to see which was easier of approach. Upon such a one or two, a knot of men would descend, and with argument, and even hustling, would urge towards one of the booths. The question would be asked, and at the reply would rise cheers or objurgation. This went on for the best part of an hour, the groups thickened and coalesced; not only were there cheers and counter-cheers; but the line of the gutter that divided the two parties became marked, partisans of the opposing factions kept rigorously to their own side, while across the dividing line, epithets, menaces and taunts began to fly. Presently there was a sufficient poll for some one to elicit the numbers, and the shout went up:

“Hamilton, one thousand nine hundred and one, Carston, one thousand eight hundred and twenty-two; Hamilton leads. Hurrah, hurrah!”

The voice had begun thin and shrill and half submerged by the surrounding noise — conversation, footsteps, wheels and hoofs. But these fell away, and the words grew sharp and distinct in an aching

stillness that split suddenly into cheers. Behind the Blue cheers, though, was a deeper and most ominous murmur, of Buff slowly making up its mind. Rumbling, it found no outlet, until the Blue band, hastily summoned and got together, broke into the strains of "Stout Hearts and True!" Some one immediately set the Buff band in motion, who burst out with "Fortune Favours the Brave." To this some joker on the Blue side, dowered with lungs of brass, managed to make heard:

"They can't play our tune!" as though the Buff effort were not even a plausible echo of the Blue, and not a deliberate counterblast. This brought the smouldering animosity to a head. Theodore saw a sort of sifting take place in the Buff crowd, and certain men whom he recognised as members of the Fancy, professional bruisers, came to the outside, next the gutter. A stout cudgel was brandished and fell with a resounding whack on the head of a Blue supporter, who went down like a log. "We can play a tune of our own!" was the triumphant shout, and in a moment, the tones of the bands were drowned in a hoarse, bellicose murmur, the sound of a crowd clearing its throat. Then came a moment's hesitation, a bending down and a gathering together. Theodore could not at first see what was happening, but he presently made out men kicking with their heels, loosening the kidney-shaped flints, larger than apples, with which the place was paved. Showers of these flew, and as if whipt by them, the two sides crashed to-

gether in an inextricable *mêlée*. Theodore's blood warmed. How he longed to be among them down there, using his two fists. He felt miserable up at his window, a mere spectator. Then he heard Mr. Statchard beside him speaking to Vardigans.

"We did well to secure Splinter Nobbs!"

Then it was a job, something prearranged, no natural boiling over of feeling, no great whole-hearted thrust for the liberties of England, but a plan got up inside one of these rooms, to set other men to fight. How tired he was of all this party machinery with which he was now entangled. He thought of his nominators, Ramplingham, whose party was Ramp-lingham, Allday, whose party was a narrow Right-eousness, Statchard, whose party was — what? How he wished he could run downstairs, place himself at the head of the Buffs, and lead them to a fistified Victory!

As if in answer to his wish, something did happen that had not been arranged. Splinter Nobbs and other paid and professional fighters were engaged in a series of hand-to-hand encounters, across the gutter in the Blue ground. Little rings of partisans surrounded these, shoving and picking quarrels and moving Blue-ward, as the trained pugilists knocked down their adversaries and found others, some easily disposed of, some also professors of the art, gentry with whom the Blues were not ill-provided, and who made the progress of those ragged, sharp-witted boys that he had noticed hanging about the Market Place

of Easthampton, as the gulls hang about the quays of a seaport, had run down Bishopgate towards Dog Lane, and now, up from all that quarter of the town behind the Buff groups of embittered partisans or came the pale, bent-shouldered workers, the men of the tan-yards and lime-kilns, far away from any hope that the Bill could help them, but finding in the controversy that raged around it the only chance of making their age-old bitter grievances audible. No sporting event did they come to witness; what they wanted was to make the election sure, so that they could perhaps diminish ever so little the ring of owners that surrounded them, owners of the land, of buildings, possessors of prestige and power, whom they dimly connected with the church and the landed aristocracy. Theodore had caught such glances, heard such remarks, got to know the lowering face, the active poverty of look and gesture, and just because all that side of English life was so strange to him, it had made so strong an impression. He saw now that element filling the Market Place from the George to the Moot Hall, rubbing its soiled hands on its coarse breeches or apron, casting uncertain glances here and there, and pressing nearer to the fight. Then with a dumb realisation of how the matter stood, all those obscure workmen pressed forward and flung themselves at the Blues, the gentry, the corn-merchants and horse-dealers, the shopkeepers, with raucous incoherent cries, and unaccustomed, mill-sail blows.

The score or so of constables, the Mayor's officers, with one or two individuals, such as Mr. Doughty the banker, tried to stop the growing riot. They might have succeeded, for the major part of the crowd on the Buff side had no clear idea of what they were doing, but there remained, well in front, the knot of prize-fighters and professional bullies that Mr. Statchard had hired, and who had their game to play, their money to earn, and had backed the event in wager and reputation. These made use of the weight of half-conscious reinforcement that was now behind them, and bored and bored into the Blue country. The object was to get as far as the other booth and prevent further polling. Mr. Statchard had issued no definite order to this effect, but hints and custom had been sufficient. Forward they went, challenging all who stood in their way, engaging those who withstood them, drawn into prolonged contests with the bruisers of the opposite colour, who resisted because they saw their pay diminished or postponed, their prestige lowered. The shouts of encouragement and rage, the whack and thump of fist or cudgel, the crash of stones and men sent flying their full length upon the ground, made a din that scared the tame pigeons of the Moot Hall roof, the sparrows of the gutters who fluttered and flapped about, cheeping and wheeling. At the windows, the householders, seeing so rough an element unleashed, bethought them of their shutters, while women who had come to gaze, fainted or withdrew. The pace be-

came faster. What had begun as half a dozen single combats, became a hoarse-voiced charge. The mob behind the Buff groups of embittered partisans or paid adherents was not particularly Buff, so far as Theodore could see. Few coloured favours were worn, but from their looks, the men and boys who shouted and pressed forward were not likely to be enfranchised at £10 or any other limit under any conceivable Bill. Their cry was "Down with Blue," and as the presiding officer and his clerks fled precipitately from the booth, it was not sufficient to cheer and taunt as the true Buff supporters did. Rough hands tore down the planking, toil-hardened shoulders worked the uprights loose. There was straw in plenty that the former occupants had rested their feet upon, paper galore, and soon flame and smoke were rising. The booth in the Blue ground was nothing but a bonfire.

Theodore turned to the Agent.

"Matters are becoming grave!"

Mr. Statchard replied with complete nonchalance:

"This will lose us the election!"

Evidently the words conveyed a meaning to him different from that which they had for Theodore.

"Can nothing be done?"

"Yes. This is the time for the Brethren of the Cresset!"

Theodore now found himself the centre of an activity as busy as that he had watched outside. Messages were despatched for Mr. Varley, if in the house. Mr. Statchard went down into the Yard, Vardigans

was all over the place, Mr. Doughty, smiling good-humouredly, was on the stairs, in conversation with others, smoothing out of his broad-brimmed hat the dent made by a stone. For some minutes this bustle continued, while outside the shouting and crackling went on. Then Theodore, who had gone to get his hat, was summoned and found himself figuring in a procession that, marshalled in the yard, was led by the band and completed by a set of individuals whom he half-recognised as being some of the members whom he had met the previous night. He took his place with Mr. Statchard, the band struck up "Rule, Britannia" and the whole moved forward.

Crossing the road, and mounting the rough paving that had been materially damaged by being kicked up for ammunition during the fight, he found the very air charged with ill-will, and sniffed it, as years ago he had sniffed the atmosphere of a ring formed in the Grammar School yard about some boyish contest. With an effort he kept his arms at his side, and on a hint from Mr. Statchard, raised his hat, bowing left and right. At that moment he became conscious of the deep change that had taken place, how much sharper and more bellicose were the feelings of the throng about him, how much more excited and spontaneous the deafening cheers that drowned the music of the band. Not only were the emotions sharper and deeper, but they seemed to have become increasingly personal; he felt that he was now a personification of Buff as he had not been a few hours previously.

At the bar of the booth, tweaked by the elbow and shoved forward by the old man at his side, he turned and shook hands with one after another of the brethren as they gave their qualification and delivered their votes. One by one the batch passed him, but there were still two or three to come, when he was conscious of a different and very definite backward surge of the crowd. Standing upon one of the protecting bars that surrounded the booth, he was able to see that all the lanes and alleys of Nether Bargate, St. Georges-by-the-Bridewell, and Cockle Row were discharging into the Market Place another hastily summoned multitude — butchers in blue smocks, horse slaughterers, market porters, and all the elements in which the strength of the Blue party lay. The Buffs were now pressed back, the King's Head, menaced with fists, sticks and stones, was cleared from danger, the fighting raged about the smoking embers of the Blue booth, while roaring counter-cheers greeted the appearance of Sir Curtius Hamilton on a balcony. This had the effect of bringing the offensive movement to a standstill, for while the Blues turned to cheer their candidate, the Buffs turned also to cheer theirs.

"Quick!" came the voice of Mr. Statchard in his ear, "back to the George!"

They had not gone many yards before the cheering began to die and was succeeded by one of those transitions so typical of the moods of an English crowd, stubborn, yet always ready to halt, never letting its

emotions go beyond a certain limit, violent, yet never to that mortal degree of employing steel or lethal discharge. There had been, a moment ago, anger, broken heads, a rough time for all those who were not hard-headed and harder-fisted. Now, like the watery sun that struggled with the vapour-laden sky, there was a cackle of conversation, laughter, and then a volley of half-expectant, half-humourous shouting.

Glancing over his shoulder, Theodore discovered that it arose from the fact that the Mayor had stepped out upon the porch to address the crowd. In vain he exerted his lungs, in vain his officers enjoined silence, the people were in no mood to listen to the harangue, presumably upon the subject of public order and civic liberty, to which he endeavoured to win their attention. The effect of the elderly gentleman of medium stature, unused to any public activity and dreading as much as any shopkeeper the uproar, the unloosening of the mob, trying to soothe and entreat with his uncertain rhetoric and feeble voice that the noise of all those packed human beings rendered the merest dumb show, was irresistibly comic. Men who felt vaguely but strongly a great world-wide, age-old wrong, and who found in this golden occasion relief for their feelings in personal combat, could not view otherwise the commonplace figure, whose gestures were those of an automaton and the movement of whose jaws produced no distinguishable sound.

The rival parties disengaged and halted, by habit and accident, along the line of the midway gutter,

their immemorial frontier. All faces turned toward the Moot Hall. At length it became apparent that what the Mayor was trying to convey was that, as a result of the scenes of the morning, he would close the poll while the Blue booth was being rebuilt. This created a great deal of argument, justification and indiscriminate shouting, but as the returning officer had left the Buff booth, at the Mayor's command, taking his books with him, there was nothing for it but to acquiesce. Further, their thoughts now distracted from animosity, and many feeling, no doubt, that honour, as they conceived it, had been satisfied, remembered that it was dinner-time, and before the immediate attendants of Mr. Statchard and Theodore could force a way for them back to the inn, the drift was perceptibly setting away from the centre of the Market Place. This pacific lull caused shutters to be thrown back and casements opened. Feeling himself unobserved, and that the prominence into which he had been dragged by the tense feelings of the morning had dissolved away for him, Theodore cast a hasty glance up at the window over the shop of Saint the mercer; his heart beat and every nerve thrilled. There, somewhat timorous behind the pursy shopkeeper, was Mrs. Burgess peering out. She caught his eye and fluttered a handkerchief. He raised his hat, expectant, and was in an instant rewarded by seeing the mother turn with a nod and a gesture and draw forward the dear object of his vows. Amid the coarse, spiritually and physically

muddy atmosphere of the crowded Market Place, how far and precious she looked, above it all, in every sense of the phrase. But her expression was overcast, her eyes lowering. Bending forward, she looked down into his eyes with such a glint of disdain, that he had a momentary sensation of dizziness, stumbled upon a displaced paving-stone, and when he had recovered himself, found that she was gone. Her mother, bowing and smiling to him effusively, might as well have been the counterpart of the Mayor. Deeply wounded, he strode forward to the inn.

XII

The Committee Room

So deeply was he affected, so distraught by the look that had pierced his heart, that he answered but half-consciously the many questions, and noticed but absent-mindedly the observations that flew from mouth to mouth, as the Buff Committee, their officials and servants, sat down to the substantial mid-day dinner of the George. Theodore found that he had behaved with great coolness and judgment. This was a welcome but not unexpected commendation from Mr. Doughty, but to his surprise, Mr. Statchard seemed to be of the same opinion. As they fell upon the collared eels and jugged hare, and drank copiously of the ale that Mrs. Armes recommended as wonderfully clearing to the throat "after a morning of shouting," it was Mr. Allday who first drew Theodore from his brooding back to the events of the day.

"I cannot understand," began the reverend gentleman, "why the Blues should be so anxious to shout 'Boroughmonger' against Mr. Carston. It's not true."

"If elections were won by truth prevailing, we should have an easier task than is actually the case."

"Certainly. But what purpose can it serve? We are promoting a Bill which does away with most boroughs and alters the remainder."

"Yet it would not be true to say that we have

gained nothing from the influence Lord Carstone still wielded in the town!" said Mr. Varley reasonably.

"I hoped that we were upon surer ground than that," the minister returned: "if I had thought that we were gaining votes by the very principles we profess to oppose, I should not have added my name to the list of nomination!"

Mr. Doughty's broad commonsense seemed touched by this. "Come, come, Allday!" he cried, "you are sufficiently of this world to know that these contests have to be won by all means, and every means. We did not inquire the private views of all the men who fought at Waterloo!"

"I am sufficiently of this world to know that we did not fly one flag and fight under another!"

"I — ah — cannot see your point," Mr. Ramplingham impinged portentously upon the discussion. "Surely we have seen little enough of Lord Carstone, since the first day, and have had little enough of his influence. Surely you are straining at a gnat!"

This metaphor brought a smile to all faces save those of the speaker and the minister. Theodore heard behind him Mr. Varley whisper to the banker, "Ramplingham hoped to see more of His Lordship!" and Mr. Allday replied with dignity:

"Thus the mystery increases, and we get further and further removed from plain dealing and fair play. Why has His Lordship backed out?"

At this there was a silence, but one of the lesser known members of the Committee, an exciseman

whose duties took him far afield, so that he had only been pointed out, and never introduced to Theodore, took up the subject with the warmth of one who is in the way of hearing gossip and has in it, as it were, a vested interest.

"They tell me," he began, "that it is all on account of the paragraph in the *Gazette* about Mr. Carston driving home the leading lady of the Royal Theatre ——" He had got so far, when, impressed by the silence in which so toothsome a bit of news had been received, he looked up, encountering glances of consternation, amusement, or shamefacedness, and stopped abruptly, having suddenly seen that Theodore was present. Mr. Allday finished his glass of water and rose, wiping his mouth scrupulously and symbolically.

"Well, gentlemen, I must dissociate myself from any further activity in this election!"

He left the room, Mr. Statchard bowing ironically behind him. Every one affected to take it lightly, but Theodore thought he divined beneath an apparent nonchalance, calculation going on as to how much influence the reverend gentleman might possess. This was only an instinctive action of all those faculties that had become in him so extremely sensitive during the contest. His main absorbing preoccupation was with the hostile glance of two adored eyes. The first conclusion he drew from the exciseman's gossip was not regarding Lord Carstone's possible connection with the lady who had asked for a lift

from Seaton. But, he reflected, if it were true that one who had proved so generous a patron was offended by so casual and innocent an act, how would the tender heart that he had so rapidly and secretly bound indissolubly to his own, be wounded? This affected him with such a sensation of almost physical sickness that he performed the most unusual action of pushing away his half-empty plate, feeling unable to swallow, and buried his face in his pewter.

When they rose, amid the awkward silence that the last remark had created, Theodore was conscious of an equally complete silence outside. Whether it was that the outburst of the morning had satisfied the more brutal instincts that exist in every English crowd, satisfied by the exercise of the fist that only stuns and does not stab, the bludgeon or paving-stone that breaks the bone but does not explode, and thus had brought about that other English instinct to say, "That'll do, they've had enough of that!" — whether it were that without the polling, passion could not be kept on the boil — or whether it were because of mere hunger, Theodore could not determine. The Market Place was half-deserted: a few boys, a few loungers, and the workmen busy about the booth replaced the dense crowd of the morning. The Committee seized the welcome respite to go back to their counting-houses and shops, to see how matters had fared in their absence.

Mr. Statchard and Vardigans went to find out how far they could minimise the adverse influence

that Mr. Allday might bring to bear on his sect, but in order to do so, they went down singly into the quarters beyond Dog Lane, where the Meeting House was and the schoolroom belonging to it. Theodore, left alone, became the prey of despair. The election held him equally by boyish enthusiasm and a strong sense of duty while it went on. When it lulled and ceased as now, his thoughts were of Marina.

He passed what appeared to him to be an interminable time, but which was in reality perhaps a quarter of an hour, pacing up and down the empty room, but at the end of that time he flung out of it, and went downstairs. There he halted. What was he to do? To inquire for Marina at Mr. Saint's? He hesitated, but his feelings were stronger than his hesitations. But he was not an individual gentleman, paying a call upon two ladies. He was a candidate. Even in the quiet state of the town he could not imagine what he might or might not bring down upon his head by so private an action. Leaning out of the passage window, looking down idly into the yard, now so quiet, where a few nondescripts, bandsmen and loungers, stood about the tap, and grooms held their masters' horses, he descried Ben the ostler leaning against the jamb of a door, his inevitable hay-stalk in his mouth, exchanging horsy gossip with a knot of cronies. The look of the man struck Theodore, who immediately rang the bell in the Committee Room and desired the waiter to ask the ostler to speak to him. He then sat down and wrote a note to Mrs. Burgess asking if

the ladies would be willing to receive him, and on Ben being seen at the door, sent this, weighted with half a crown, and disposed himself as best he might until the answer should be forthcoming. The only stipulation he made was that Ben should discover if there might not be a back way — to which Ben replied with no hesitation that all the houses in that part of the Market Place had back entries upon Mid-dens Alley.

Thus assured he waited, and not for long. In less than ten minutes Ben was back to say that he had seen the maid at Saint's, and that the ladies had already returned to Hoake, in the care of Mr. Burgess. Ben was withdrawing, satisfied that he had carried out the instructions he had been given, but the news brought back to Theodore the resolution of youth that had lain dormant beneath the perplexities of the past week.

"Can I have a horse?"

"There are the posthorses, sir."

"Saddle one for me!"

Ben stood fingering his belt.

"I don't rightly like to, sir."

Theodore gave him the look of one totally unused to such speech. It penetrated Ben's intelligence.

"What would the Missis say to me if you was to come to grief?"

Theodore almost smiled at such solicitude while recognising it to be genuine and well intended.

"Then do you saddle another and ride behind me, and see that I am not molested."

This appeared to convince Ben, who touched his forelock and went. Theodore descended to his room to give a glance in the mirror, a tug at his hat, to get a pair of gloves and a cane. By the time he was below, two horses were standing saddled by the tap, and evidently with the landlady's approval. Dusk was descending, the yard emptying, and it needed only a word to Ben to be sure that they would leave the city in the least conspicuous manner possible. Actually they went out by the tap into Middens Alley, and across Castle Ditches and by St. Georges into Nether Bargate, and so on to the road to Hoake.

No sooner did Theodore find the low rustic villas and gardens of the suburbs about him, than he touched his horse to a smart trot, and the stiff-jointed beast of traffic, recognising him for one of those who would take no denial that age might plead or ill-temper suggest, stuck to the pace with the regularity of a machine, for the half-hour that sufficed to cover the distance, and bring them among the dull-glowing windows, the thatched roofs, and wooden palings of the village. Not a soul was in the street, of course, and Theodore pulled up at the stable gate of the Rectory, dismounted, and throwing his reins to Ben, knocked on Mrs. Jordan's kitchen door, and went in.

It was not in the capacity of the Jordans to be surprised. They sat each side of the glowing and snoring oven, she sewing and watching her saucepans, he reading the Bible — or at least keeping it open on his knee. At Theodore's entry they both put aside their tasks and took his cloak and hat, and while Jordan

went out to see if Ben would have "something to take," and even sit by the fire, as the posthorses could be trusted to stand, Mrs. Jordan put on the kettle so that whatever was taken should be hot. While he pulled off his gloves, Theodore inquired and learned that Mr. Burgess was in his study and that the ladies had gone up to dress for dinner. He bit his lips, undecided; then, as a great wave of feeling seemed to take him off his feet, the imperative need to know, to find some certainty that would appease the awful impression of that last look of hers, he muttered something, pushed through the green baize door into the hall, leapt noiselessly up the stairs three at a time, thanking God he had no spurs on, and tapped, softly, in unison with his aching heart-beats, at the door of Marina's room. He was answered by a low-voiced "Come in!" touched the latch and entered.

She was standing before her mirror, a candle at each end of the dressing-table; she was fully dressed and apparently regarding herself mournfully. At his entry she turned, and her eyes, that to his fancy had deepened in colour, regarded him with a look at once so wounding and so wounded, that he stood, transfixed, upon the mat. Neither spoke. Their silence seemed to freeze the house, in which there was not a sound. It lasted long enough for Theodore to be acutely conscious that he was guilty of a breach of good manners in thus bursting in upon a lady's privacy. But he was equally conscious that this was not resented by her. Something quite other caused

her thus to preoccupy herself with him, for she showed not the slightest surprise, but appeared to expect him, and this was in itself a comfort. She was struck less speechless than he, and said:

“Well?”

Well what? He could not think. When at length he managed to control his throat that throbbed and his lips that quivered, his voice came astonishingly in a whisper:

“Marina, what is it?”

“Ask yourself, Mr. Carston; I will not presume to qualify such conduct!” The intention was clearer than the words. He implored her:

“What have I done?”

“How do I know? I am not possessed of your confidence. Ask Lord Carstone — ask the lady who plays at the Royal Theatre — ask the *Gazette* newspaper — ask the whole world, but do not ask me. How can I know?”

In his utter bewilderment, certain things became clear to him. He had not mentioned the companion of his return from Seaton. Marina, on the other hand, had heard gossiping attempts to explain Lord Carstone’s sudden relinquishing of all interest in the election. Above all, she had seen the fatal newspaper. He must explain.

“Marina, listen to me!”

“Alas, I have listened too much!”

“I can explain all ——”

“To every one, no doubt!”

So implacable an eye, so bitter a denial he had never experienced. But the monstrous injustice of it called him to rebellion. He would make her listen. There lurked even a buried hope, somewhere in his heart, that she wanted to, but must make him pay first for the pang he had so unwittingly caused her.

Alas, the instant that he spent in forming the words was fatal. There was a bustle below, the sound of doors opening and shutting, the odours of dinner, the sense of preparation for that supreme rite of the quiet orderly day, in that house. He heard it and hesitated too long. She would not allow it to appear that she was waiting for him.

"I must go down," she said. "Pray let me pass!"

As he did so, he caught her hand. She did not withdraw it. Bending low he kissed it with humble reverence. She withdrew it, neither so quickly as to seem pettish, nor so slowly as to seem lingering, and swept down the stairs.

He followed her with bowed head, and was met with anxious inquiry from Jordan as to whether he was dining. Feeling that at such a juncture he ought not to be long absent from the field of battle, he replied in the negative, but awaited the elders by the dining-room fire, to pay his respects.

Mr. Burgess greeted him as though he had seen him that very morning, and made inquiry as to the state of the poll, much as he might have inquired after the progress of some scholar at the Grammar School. From the assured and accustomed position of Rector

at Hoake, the bustle and stir of the town, the rapid making of money, the contact of human beings crowded together were unreal, unheard-of, out of sight. Mrs. Burgess' polite sentences were even more remote than her brother-in-law's. To her Theodore Carston was a young man, a creature of boots and stocks, to be deferred to and to take wine with. Upon the background of such permanent and settled personalities, in what bright colours did Marina appear to Theodore! Her sudden temper, pride that would brook not an instant's disregard, at once dominated and attracted him. To possess that sheaf of brilliant alternating moods, that queenly head and upright carriage, to take it by storm or stratagem, seemed to him a far more important project than the winning of an election. Yet here he was, held at arm's length, scorned and misrepresented. He must prove himself, go back to the struggle and cut a figure there that might satisfy so exacting a standard. Thus, muttering platitudes, half hoping for a glance, a hint, and getting none, he drank off the glass of wine Mrs. Burgess had poured out and took his leave.

In the kitchen, the Jordans were busy with dinner, and Ben, they said, after having "something to take," had gone out to stand by his horses. Theodore closed the door behind him, groped an instant in the blackness of the night, and was then able to make out his mount and Ben's, standing as horses will, noses down, waiting for the next thing to happen to them, a perfect picture of servitude. But they stood alone.

He waited a moment and then called:

"Hullo, there!"

Silence; and then, curiously, from the garden path that sloped steeply up behind the stable buildings, came the sound of footsteps. In the never perfect darkness of the English night, Ben could be made out. Theodore spoke sharply.

"Come, I must be gone!"

For answer Ben unhooked the reins from the palings, slipped his own over his arm, drew round the horse that Theodore had ridden and stood to it, steadying the beast for him to mount. He did so, and waited in the road while Ben shut the gate. But a suspicion still clung to his mind.

"What were you doing, up the garden?"

"I thought I saw some one I knew!"

"What do you mean?"

"As I came out o' the kitchen, I see the maid talking t' some one by the hedge!"

"There's nothing in that, is there?"

"I dunno!"

"The girl can have a sweetheart if she likes."

"This sweetheart weren't there for no good."

"You knew him?"

"I reckon so."

"Who was it?"

"I'll find out for sartin!"

There Theodore left it, with a shrug. He did not, in fact, take much stock of the ostler's action. His mind was on more important things. He had come

at a trot, and at a trot he went back. The worn old horses knew the road better than he, and Ben, falling behind, left him to his own thoughts. These were contradictory. The impulse that had drawn him so urgently to Hoake, to Marina, seemed to have sprung back, forcing him just as stringently away from her frown, her contempt. He did not draw rein until the shadow of the city gate was above him, and from thenceforward kept his horse at a sharp walk. The streets were emptying, and there was little chance of their being recognised, little disposition to molest them. Yet he noticed that Ben ranged up alongside of him, until they were safely within the George Yard. The first person he met, as he entered, was Mrs. Armes, who with upraised hands declared she never! she was thinking of him. Touched, if slightly overcome by such solicitude, he expressed a hope that he had caused her no anxiety. She replied with a leer — a leer which had been famous for its effect for thirty years — that she knew what young men were, no one better.

“Now just you go and sit down in the dining-room, and I’ll have a nice little bit of steak warmed up, and some hot punch, and you’ll feel all over alike!”

He did as he was bid. The glimpse of Mr. Starchard and Vardigans bent over books, the prosy periods of Mr. Ramplingham pointing out how right he was about something, reached him dimly. He suddenly realised that he had ridden twelve miles and experienced violent emotions. As he moodily flicked

his boots with his cane, his supper was announced. He fell upon it, distracted, but it forced itself upon his attention. The tang of the fried onions, the aroma of the hot punch, the satisfying flesh, mellowed his fancy and won over his latent good temper. He began to reflect upon the immense ability of old Mr. Statchard, the industry and quickness of Vardigans, the laughable but likable pomposity of Ramplingham, the sterling qualities of the banker and the merchant. From these he came down to the amusing but effective care that Mrs. Armes took of him, the loyalty of Ben. He liked them all, but most of all he liked punch. That was not what he had hastened back from Hoake to do — to sit there with his legs stuck out, his clothes unchanged, his hat, cane and gloves on a chair beside him, his right arm stretched to lift, fill and lift again, the solid-stemmed rummer, full of that hot, searching, convincing liquid. But that was what he had found it most appropriate to do, and he went on doing it. By the time he had ladled out the depths of the tilted bowl, he felt that he really ought to share his happiness with some one, with every one, and hauling himself elaborately to his feet, he went to tell the Committee, the people of the inn, the whole Buff party, all Easthampton if they would listen, what excellent people they were.

The only person he could find was Vardigans. All the rest of the Buffs seemed to have gone home. Vardigans was writing, and writing in a book. Theodore watched the pen travelling with unhesitating

and fluent skill across the pages. He meant to interrupt, to treat Vardigans warmly. But the sight of that swift-travelling pen fascinated him. After watching it for some minutes, he left Vardigans without a word. A sleepy waiter was blowing out candles. He took the hint and went to bed.

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When he woke in the morning, he listened in vain for any of that tumult that had characterised the gathering of political forces of the election days. Noise there was, of horses and men, but of a different rhythm, dry, ordered, precise. He dressed, and going down, stepped into the Committee Room to look out. Two of the maids were already half way out of the window, but on his approach, withdrew tittering. He looked out. The Market Place was full of Light Dragoons. A knot of officers stood in the portico of the Moot Hall, and near them, their horses were being led up and down. Cockle Row and the adjoining alleys were full of red uniforms and brass helmets, rang with spur and sabre. A guard had been set over the booths, the Moot Hall, and the lines of picketed horses, while a double patrol moved up and down the dividing line between the Blue ground and the Buff. Men eyed the intruders askance, with that dubiousness which has always lain at the bottom of the English mind, concerning the regular army, but women were pleased enough to be asked for a bucket of water, or to make a place about their stoves. The children adored the soldiers.

The Mayor, obsequious and flattered, was making much of them. Downstairs, the coffee-room was full of officers. Mrs. Armes was losing none of her opportunities. Armes was silent and serviceable, the whole place agog.

Theodore had some difficulty in getting his breakfast, the military had eaten all the eggs and drunk all the coffee, but on seeing his plight, an officer invited him to join their table where the dishes were piled high, the conversation merry, and the atmosphere had that irresponsibility that belongs to those who live under orders.

They were mainly junior officers who had been on duty while their seniors ate, and were now free for half an hour to refresh themselves. They talked horses, and he was delighted to join in, to agree that they had had cursed luck in being moved to a d — d slow hole like Seaton and being made to miss all the hunting. And then, when they got the joyful order to return to Easthampton, which was within reasonable distance of three packs of hounds —

“What d’you suppose the reason was, sir?” asked a florid-faced ensign, with his mouth full, his coffee cup raised.

“I haven’t an idea!” Theodore was obliged to reply.

“ — Why, it seems that we had been sent away, for fear the men should get mixed up in some low brawl over this cursed election! And now, damme, they bring us back, to police the horrid people!”

"Dear, dear, how unfortunate!" was all Theodore could think of.

"Yes," chimed in a dark-eyed lieutenant, two seats away, with a superb affectation of not being such a schoolboy as the speaker, perhaps twelve months his junior, "and you do enjoy the job!"

"There's one thing I should enjoy more!" asseverated the first; "that would be to get hold of this precious fellow who stands in the Reform interest, and put him in the horse-trough — what's his name?"

"Carston!" supplied the lieutenant.

"Yes," concluded the ensign, "if you come across him, sir, you might tell him so from me!"

"Now, gentlemen!" cried the captain, who was presiding at the end of the table. And taking their swords and helmets from the pegs, they returned to duty, leaving Theodore speechless.

Polling had begun again. Under the protection of the military, many a shy or reluctant Blue voter came hurrying to the reconstituted booth. On the other hand, Mr. Statchard was sending out urgent messages into every alley or court where a Buff vote might still be found. Meanwhile the men of scarlet and brass were sedulously indifferent, riding slowly up and down the appointed beat, standing silent and unmovable where they had been posted, or lounging in alert idleness about their billets. Suddenly they would be galvanised by the order to change the guard, and then relapsed into sitting or standing near their horses, gambling, talking, cleaning accoutrements.

Around them the Market Place was only sparsely filled, the polling going on sedately and slowly. Now and again some little ruffle of excitement — the shouting out of the numbers, which showed the votes cast for Theodore to be less by forty odd than those cast for Sir Curtius, or when an individual, persuaded reluctantly to the Blue booth, suddenly voted Buff with great vehemence, bawling to all the world, “I ha’ drunk their beer, I ha’ rid in their carriage, and now I ha’ voted again’ ’em!” only to be hustled away by indignant Blues.

Towards mid-morning, even this desultory activity died down. Mr. Statchard was visibly agitated, drove out himself in his gig, bringing individuals to the booth, or conferring earnestly with ward men and messengers. Then, with Ramplingham, Doughty and Varley, he went across to the Moot Hall, to interview the Mayor, Theodore learned.

“I’m afraid,” the latter said to Vardigans, “that we have but little time to counteract the defection of His Lordship and Mr. Allday!”

“It remains to be seen,” laughed Vardigans good-humouredly. “We shall try to keep the poll open as long as we can persuade the Mayor to do so. The other side will, no doubt, try to get it closed.”

“Why should they do that?”

“Well, we know each other’s men. They’ve polled theirs, and we’ve polled ours. It’s now a question of the wobblers. We stand to gain rather by fellows like the one who just now voted Buff in

the Blue booth, and by those who have been holding out —— ”

“Holding out?”

Vardigans gave a glance so ingenuous that it amounted to a negative wink.

“ — those who wait to see what may happen —— ”

“Difficult people!”

“Very. So many of the Blues know exactly what they don’t want. We, on the other hand, hope to secure some who don’t know quite what they do want!”

“I think I have heard Mr. Varley express the same opinion!”

“Then, you see, it must be right!” Vardigans wagged his head, sagely mocking, and turned the leaves of one of his registers, as though he would fain be busy with his registering.

Theodore left him, and wandered about the quiet and now half-empty inn, in which the ordinary household tasks were going on, as though nothing momentous were passing outside. Eventually he went up to the Committee Room, and stood gazing out at the stirring but remarkably quiet scene below. Then he saw the Buff leaders returning from the Moot Hall and awaited them. Various Committee men and officials appeared from nowhere in particular and waited with him.

As the old lawyer entered the room, there was a hush of anticipation. He paid little heed but went

straight to the table where Vardigans sat, took up a list that the clerk with sure instinct had prepared. About him, groups surrounded Mr. Doughty and Mr. Varley whispering to know what had occurred. These carefully postponed pronouncement until the old man had scrutinised the list, unpursed his lips and addressed the roomful.

"Well, gentlemen, the Mayor will close the poll at noon!"

There was a general gasp of astonishment, a chorus of "Why?" "So early!" "This is a party move!"

"The reason," added the lawyer, "is largely that the military dislike this campaigning!"

This disposed of all doubts, and the room rapidly emptied. There was an almost feverish activity, men going hither and thither, sending or running messages, taking matters into their own hands, in order to rout out and bring up some individual voter. Theodore saw Mr. Doughty write a note which he had no doubt was to that old Mr. Dormer. Vardigans went with it to the Bank. Meanwhile, outside, the news had leaked out, the Blues taking it with evident triumph, the Buffs with surly vindictive activity. One by one, this or that unwilling voter was dragged to the Buff booth, escaping if left alone a moment, or even refusing to vote. Then came one in such a state of intoxication that he could not stand or speak, and though every effort was made to prop him up and catch from his lips some articulate syllable, the returning officer finally refused to poll him.

Now taunts arose, the cry of "Down with the Boroughmonger" became more manifest, and "Down with Hamilton and Slavery" was freely responded, but much as many might hate the parade of soldiers, the naked swords looked very bright, the horses very big, and each party remained within its own ground.

So with much waiting about, and occasional haling of individuals along under various sorts of compulsion to the booths, the last hour passed. The clock of St. George's boomed twelve. The returning officers closed their books, and under guard, left the booths forsaken, and repaired to the Moot Hall, where the Mayor and officials awaited them. The guards were now dismissed, the soldiers paraded, and at a word, mounted and jingled off. But not as they had come. Behind them swarmed and vociferated a crowd of inn-keepers calling for the price of the beer that had been drunk, women crying for payment for food that had been taken, while children hooted and threw stones, and men taunted the troopers with being butchers, twopenny postmen, anything that could conveniently be shouted. Finally, the Quartermaster, at the rear of the column, was so seriously incommoded that it was necessary to halt the last troop, turn them into line and clear the mouth of Northgate, while the regiment with its baggage got away at a trot. This manœuvre finally disposed of any prestige the soldiers had gained, and a roar of hatred and contempt rang after the rear-guard, as they clattered away to catch up their comrades.

Now a hush, an expectancy, quieted the slowly thickening crowd. Men would not engage in too absorbing a conversation, would not take their eyes off the porch of the Moot Hall, for fear of missing the declaration of the poll. No one knew what was passing within the building, but Theodore had no doubt that Mr. Statchard was caustically objecting to any vote in which the tiniest flaw could be found. Yet nothing was to be seen, and his mind wandered to other crowds he had surveyed, a religious procession in Florence, a great market at Seville. He was mentally comparing those other crowds with the sombre clothes, brown and black, under the sombre sky, the stubborn, inarticulate good humour, that took and gave knocks so hard, and rubbed them and grinned, that would not push violence to the utmost, and yet seemed, as now, defrauded if it could not have a good "row," when, all at once, that crowd before him gave a sort of united hitch, pronounced, in unison what sounded like the exclamation "There!"

He looked up and saw that the Mayor had stepped stiffly out of the upper window, on to the portico of the Moot Hall. After the exclamation came a hush so complete that the rumbling of a cart, streets away, the flapping of the pigeons about the belfry, the throwing up of a window sash, could be heard. The Mayor held a paper in his hand; he raised his head, and spoke in his thin voice:

"Carston, two thousand one hundred and three!"

A long-drawn "Ah!" abruptly stifled, allowed him to proceed:

“Hamilton, two thousand one hundred and thirteen!”

Then the silence was shivered to fragments, and the fragments annihilated. As the reeds about a marsh-land estuary are struck by the autumn gale, so the very level of the crowd seemed upset, as though the Market Place had been tilted by some subterranean upheaval. The Blue crowd, letting loose an ear-splitting yell, appeared by the raising of all heads, the opening of all mouths, the flinging aloft of sticks and hats, to be lifted into the air. The Buff crowd, turning down its heads, closing mouths, bent under the blow, and making to disperse, seemed to have shrunk. It did in fact disintegrate, break up, and dwindle away homeward. Statchard, Ramplingham and the others had no difficulty in threading their way across to the George, which, empty and silent, echoed to solitary calls for this horse, or that conveyance, as Buff supporters made their way, singly or in pairs, out by Middens Alley. The leaders of the party congregated in the Committee Room. Mr. Varley and Mr. Doughty both shook Theodore warmly by the hand, Mr. Ramplingham appeared to nurse a grudge against him, while Mr. Statchard ignored him and went straight to the table where Vardigans was already at work.

Meanwhile the Blue crowd had turned to the King's Head, every window of which was full, every passage choked with stentorian rejoicing. With hands so eager that they hindered one another, the

band was marshalled, conveyances lined up, a procession formed, and Sir Curtius Hamilton, bowing and smiling, was drawn in procession round the Market Place. But more than that. Tumultuous gangs, shoving and tripping one another, fetched out from some place of readiness a queer contrivance like a table with a large solid armchair fixed upon it. Amid the double-lined horsemen, the forest of flags, the incessant din, this was forced into the procession, the elected member was hauled from his seat, set in the chair, and at the right point in the chorus of "Stout Hearts and True," the bearers of the contraption, by a well-concerted jerk, flung him high in the air and caught him again. Theodore, spell-bound, could not drag himself from the window, could almost, so infectious was the enthusiasm, have applauded the handsome victor. As the manœuvre was repeated right under the windows of the George, he raised his hat, and placing his hand upon his breast, bowed. At that moment, a stone whizzed through the air, struck him on the head and stretched him upon the floor.

XIII

The Glebe

LIKE many another person of stronger intellect, Mrs. Burgess had long given up trying to account for the phenomena that passed before her eyes. She would hardly have found any distraction, not to say interest, in the progress of the election at Easthampton. But, like other parents of her kind and generation, an irresistible force constantly moved her to do things that she had no special wish to do, and this force was the erratic insatiable will of a daughter to whom, with age and lassitude, she was becoming increasingly subject. When Marina first expressed a wish to witness the actual contest, her mother felt no thrill, but said to herself — and she was never very articulate — that here was another of the dear girl's fancies. If thwarted, the dear girl would be difficult. If indulged she would look a credit to her surviving parent. More than once Mrs. Burgess had found herself vastly entertained by these escapades, into which her daughter drew her. Deeper down, and slightly connected with these outward happenings, was one of the fundamental beliefs of the good lady's secular creed — that daughters were born to be married. That they should appear to advantage and be interested as spectators in the pursuits of gentlemen, particularly young gentlemen, seemed therefore

natural enough, and complacency soon replaced the inertia which was characteristic of her, and had been increased by residence in the tropics. There could be no objection to availing themselves of the point of vantage offered by Saint's first-floor drawing-room, and there ensconced, she experienced mildly those feelings that her predecessors in outlook and condition may have felt, looking down upon a tourney. She was, moreover, gratified by a certain consideration shown her by her host and hostess, climbers upon the social ladder. They knew, as well as she, the dim but unmistakable distinction between tradespeople, even the most successful and respectable, and the widow of a clergyman. She was, therefore, extremely content, and not very attentive to what went on before or around her. She viewed her daughter's contrasting animation without alarm. Animation suited Marina's style of beauty, just as certain fashionable colours, lilac and a shade of green, did. The child was never still, and occasionally did things that the mother would never have dreamed of — entering into conversation with gentlemen, as though she were a gentleman, exchanging opinions, as if exchanging snuff-boxes, holding out a newspaper at arm's length, to scan it, in a fashion that was hardly lady-like. Mrs. Burgess let it pass. Marriage — and it would be odd if Marina long avoided that state — would correct such details. Mrs. Burgess was, then, not actually perturbed until, just as she was assuring herself that she would be able to close her eyes dis-

creetly without being noticed, she was jerked awake by Marina's insisting vehemently that they must go home. The only explanation that Mrs. Burgess could think of was some trifling indisposition, and as this could not be argued about in public, there was nothing for it but to give the order for the Rectory carriage to be brought round, and to get into it. They had not proceeded very far upon the road before Mrs. Burgess satisfied herself that this was an insufficient reason, but she had become used to Marina's whims, and now only craved the quiet of the Rectory fireside, at which to resume the comforting somnolence that had been so brusquely interrupted.

In fact, without any protest, Mrs. Burgess soon forgot the election and all concerning it. When, suddenly, just as they were all coming down to dinner, the young man (for so Theodore Carston always figured in her thoughts) appeared in his boots, and smelling slightly of horses, unwashed and inattentive, running up and down stairs inconveniently and abruptly, she cocked a mental maternal eye. She had seen dozens of young men get into this very promising and creditable state when brought into contact with Marina, but rarely one who appeared more serious about it. For it had not escaped her that young Mr. Carston was connected with a Lord, which was something to be proud of, and was in danger of becoming a Member of Parliament. Mrs. Burgess, used to Oriental despotism, had more difficulty in assessing the precise worth of such a qualification, but fell back

upon the fact that it must be a distinction, for it permitted the writing of the letters M.P. after a name. She mentally tried on the effect of saying, as she was now pretty sure she would soon be able to say, "my son-in-law, the member" and of gracefully alluding to Mr. Carston's inability to be present at some social function, on account of his duties. This sort of thing she understood. It was quite in the Residency style. When, therefore, the young man had departed, and dinner was over, and the Rector in his study, she tried some leading questions upon her daughter, expecting blushes, avowals, confidences, and the solid foundation of maternal pride, upon which she might now begin to dwell, and to base the proper social glamour that would gild her declining years.

Alas for her hopes! Marina took no advantage of the opportunities afforded her by the most leading questions, the most oblique surmises that a mother of Mrs. Burgess' mental habit and outlook could propound. The only replies elicited were in disdainful monosyllables, and the proud girl held herself rigid and aloof, regarding the fire. Not for the first time did Mrs. Burgess wonder mildly at the fact that she had become the parent of so intractable an offspring. Partly native curiosity and partly a very proper solicitude prompted her to more searching inquiries. Her practical and kindly mind could not conceive other explanation than some ailment, and being herself a martyr to every respectable indisposition that

middle age, sojourn in less temperate climes, and the efforts of medical science could induce, she began to question Marina upon such lines.

The girl protested, with a short mirthless laugh, that she had never felt better in her life, and rose as though to leave the room for the purpose, Mrs. Burgess feared, of avoiding further inquiry. But this brought out the strongest convictions that the mother possessed. That any daughter of hers, or any one else, should have those sentiments so natural and becoming, regarding a young man, she could understand and even welcome, with their natural result in the interruption of the perfect smoothness with which polite behaviour should flow from grace to courtesy. Indisposition she could equally admit as a good and sufficient reason. But brusque and abrupt behaviour, to those who had been hosts, and to herself, without stated cause, was beyond her wide tolerance, and she felt bound to remonstrate.

"Really, my love, I cannot think that you should allow mere pettishness to break off an enjoyable visit. It is wanting in respect to Mr. and Mrs. Saint, in consideration for Mr. Carston, who, I feel sure, sets some store by our interest, and, I am bound to add, in dutifulness to myself."

Marina turned her head, without hesitating in her progress to the door, and her mother could but remark the beauty of the clear-cut profile.

"Very well, I will apologise to Mrs. Saint ——"

"My love, I beg that you will do no such thing.

How you do take one up. I was only remarking —— ”

“ — that I am a graceless guest and an ungrateful daughter, and that I do not exhibit a concern with the affairs of a candidate for Parliamentary honours, which he certainly shows no desire that I should.”

Mrs. Burgess could recall Theodore's upward look, towards the window they had occupied. It was the only thing that had impressed her during the day's proceedings.

“I'm sure Mr. Carston appeared most devoted —— ”

The word appeared to be ill-chosen. A flush tinged the girl's cheeks. “Most devoted to the most public characters. In future, pray spare me the repetition of his name!”

Mrs. Burgess knew, as far as any lady of the time admitted to knowing, that gentlemen were not always what they seemed. She deemed the knowledge, however, precocious in Marina, and sure that it could not be founded on any exact evidence, she continued:

“My dear child, Mr. Carston's name is sufficiently distinguished by the connection it shows with some of the highest in the land, and is likely to be more so, on account of —— ” but Marina interposed:

“I have heard enough, Mamma, I am going to my room!” with averted head and tone so resonant that Mrs. Burgess felt sure she was on the verge of tears. Had she known less of Marina she would have been seriously perturbed. As it was, curiosity was her

strongest feeling. When, therefore, she was assured by the sound of a closing door, that Marina meant what she had said — a conclusion which Mrs. Burgess never found too easy on account of the way in which her daughter said the things she meant — that lady roused herself, went to the drawing-room door, and opening it, stood listening.

There, in the heart of the solid, well-built old house, clean with constant polishing, warm with the half-dozen open fires that roared, winter long, in it, hardly cold before they were relighted, the candles in the sconces shone upon a silence underlined by a multitude of small, regular noises. From beyond the baize door that led to the Jordans' domain came muffled kitchen sounds. A tiny draught piped treble in the keyhole of the front door. But Mrs. Burgess was able to assure herself upon the point that interested her. There was no sound of voices from the study. The Rector was alone. Delaying a moment, to snuff the drawing-room candles, she went to the study door and tapped. There followed a pause, then a deep sound which might be that made by an elderly gentleman clearing a throat which had become slightly husky from sleeping with the mouth open. Use and habit, however, lent to the sound, as it were a spiritual significance, making it symbolise the spirit taking flight from far regions in which it had been adventuring, and alighting, on return to the sphere of every-day life. The Rector's voice said "Come in," and in Mrs. Burgess went.

From the doorway, an observer more curious than she might have remarked that the benevolent eyes, the smooth forehead, the decorously few and silvered hairs up to which the spectacles had been pushed, that were alone apparent above the back of a low and comfortable chair, expressed some mild protest at being thus disturbed. But Mrs. Burgess was no observer, and was accustomed, and deemed herself authorised by her position in the world, to go direct to such small ends as she pursued. She therefore came forward without hesitation, and within the light of the candles presented herself, and was received in tones now modulated to consideration if not comprehension.

“You, Sophie! Sit down. What is it?”

“A small matter, but one upon which you can readily inform me!” She paused. The Rector adjusted himself in his chair, allowed his elbows to rest on the arms, drew down his spectacles, focussed Mrs. Burgess, and allowing his finger tips to come lightly together, signifying that he was all attention. He even bowed very slightly as though admitting that, without doubt, he could supply any information desired. This was all Mrs. Burgess required to proceed.

“You will understand, I feel sure, how much Marina’s future means to me?”

Again the Rector bowed, and a slight pursing of the lips could conceivably have meant that he found it natural, and that he himself was not uninterested.

"I have been gratified of late, to notice a certain feeling exhibited toward her by young Mr. Carston. Nothing serious has yet, I think, passed between them. One would expect that a young gentleman of such pleasing manners would acquaint me first of his intentions. But I have made no obstacle to their seeing as much of each other as was convenient, without, of course, actually throwing them together!"

"You have acted with great discretion, and perfect taste, as one might be sure you would!" put in the Rector, with conviction that was transparently genuine. It was. He had been right. He generally was. His approval brought Mrs. Burgess straight to the point.

"You know that it was at Marina's instance that we procured the advantages of a view of the election proceedings from the Saints' parlour, which they so obligingly put at our disposal. I must say I never saw the dear girl appear to better advantage! Then, all of a sudden ——"

Here Mrs. Burgess raised both her mittened hands, and the Rector both his eyebrows. After a moment's pause to give weight to what she had to impart, Mrs. Burgess went on:

"— from what cause, I cannot say, but evidently from something she learned or fancied, then, and there, she contracted a profound distaste for the whole affair, and begged me so urgently to take her home, that I was forced to comply, although finding it inconvenient!"

The Rector made a slight grimace. What was all this?

"As soon as opportunity presented itself, I endeavoured to find out the cause of so abrupt a change in her sentiments. Marina is high-spirited, and I could only elicit that young Mr. Carston has offered her some fancied slight and vexation. The point upon which I desire your enlightenment, is whether there can be any foundation for the ideas in her head. You regard Mr. Carston as a very estimable ——?"

Here Mrs. Burgess stopped. She was not going to say "son-in-law," for she was as well versed as any of her generation in the rules which governed the arrangement of the future of children, entirely, of course, without reference to their parents' desires, and for those children's good.

"A most charming young man!" was the Rector's vindication of his pupil. More he would not say. His sister-in-law was doing what he desired she should do. He troubled himself very little as to his niece's moods, or her mother's solicitude. He would feel more settled — and settlement in life was what one of his years and outlook most keenly desired — were the adumbrated marriage to come off. He felt little fear about it, and was certainly not going to have his good but unremarkable relative taking too active a part in such matters, and quite likely doing more harm than good. His thoughts about the matter were far more deeply concerned with the possible opinions His Lordship might hold on the sub-

ject. He was not going to be forced or hurried, or to be made to show his wishes. He was, however, glad to know of any factors in the case such as his sister-in-law had revealed. He might want further information. So he said gently:

"No. I cannot imagine any foundation for Marina's feelings. We must see. Let us sleep upon it."

Mrs. Burgess had so considerable an opinion of her brother-in-law that she acquiesced without demur. The Rector said to himself that he would finish the chapter which he was engaged in reading, and became lost in thought so profound that he did not reopen his eyes until the clock struck midnight, when he retired also.

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It was Jordan's duty in the morning to shave the Rector, it was his pleasure to talk. Feeling unequal, perhaps, to sustaining any of those arguments which involve a matching of wits, or, in this case, a setting up of his servitude against the Rector's privilege, the one occasion when he tended to garrulity was that when he had his master firmly fixed in the chair, copiously lathered, and precluded from rejoining by the risk of having his nose cut off. It was under such circumstances that he commented on the conduct of the Blue organ, the *Tribune*, which he qualified as Owdacious, in printing Mr. Carston's name in a paragraph which he characterised as "wholly a bit o' tantaliza-

tion, an' all — and had spiled him with Lord Carstone, that was a sure moral!" Naturally the Rector had not seen the opposition newspaper, for he took his politics from Lord Carstone, just as Jordan took *his* from him. He might have dismissed the matter as mere political buffoonery, had Jordan not gone on to elaborate upon the subject, in the light of gossip picked up at the George, where he stopped for bite and sup, while driving the ladies into the city. There he had come across Ben the ostler in a great state of excitement. That worthy had just been accosted by one Ebby, who had accused him, merely on account of his ostler's breeches and gaiters, of making off with her husband, a sailor. The truth was, so far as Jordan had been informed, that the man in question was "wanted" by the authorities, but was in hiding. But the fact that had interested Jordan in this otherwise irrelevant rigmarole of mere gossip, was the fact that Ben had declared that he now "saw daylight" through the cooping of young Mr. Carston, or soon would. To this end Ebby had been plied with drink in the tap of the George to see if she knew more. Like all women, "contrary creatures" was Jordan's comment, she had gone right off and told a long tale of seeing Mr. Ogle, his Lordship's gentleman, flung out of the back door of the theatre, by a lady of the company playing there who had thrown after him coin and trinkets, so that the boys in the street had scrambled for them. A nice way to treat a gentleman's gentleman, if true, was Jordan's comment.

At this point, Jordan gave the concluding wipe to his master's satin-pink and smooth chin, and stood back, regarding his handiwork. The Rector, who had been able, during the recital, to do no more than make noises such as "Um" and "Hm," now rose, surveyed himself in the small oval mirror, and dismissed his servant with:

"Let me see a copy of that news-sheet!"

Jordan had no doubt that he could procure one. With regard to the other items of gossip, the Rector made no comment, but with him this did not mean that he had been inattentive. For years he had tacitly encouraged Jordan's morning chronicle. It saved him a great deal — saved him from appearing inquisitive upon matters that might not be deemed his business, saved him from having to ask direct questions, and being thus certified as of knowledge of things he preferred not to know, gave him a secure hold over current happenings in the village and even in Easthampton. Never was he more gratified by the result of this practice than on the present occasion.

After breakfast, Jordan brought him the paper, which he accepted casually and perused carefully the moment the study door shut upon his solitude.

Now besides being a priest by office, and a kindly man by inclination, Mr. Burgess had those other qualities peculiar to his cloth. He was a gentleman without being an aristocrat, a man of the world without being a worldly man. He felt, in a moment, as

Theodore and as Lord Carstone would feel in reading the offensive paragraph. But he also felt that it was his duty to put in its place this vulgar and upstart suggestion.

First, therefore, he rang, and required the presence of Mrs. Burgess. She found him standing before the fire, a shade, as of an unofficial Sunday, subduing his more general attitude of a dutiful brother-in-law.

"I have laid my hand, by chance, Sophie," he said, for he never admitted the service that Jordan rendered whilst shaving him, "upon the cause of Marina's conduct, which caused you some preoccupation!"

Mrs. Burgess was about to speak, but the Rector, very much the Rector at that moment, rendered it unnecessary.

"There has appeared in one of the papers of the town a paragraph relating to the abduction of young Mr. Carston, reflecting his conduct in a slanderous, and I feel sure, dishonest way. I know him very well, having been charged with his education. I think I have seen Marina indulging in a somewhat mannish habit of reading the newspapers. You may assure her, on my authority, that the paragraph she has seen is wholly untrue, and that in attaching weight to it, she is encouraging the vulgarest abuse. You may even suggest to her that she might be more choice in her reading!"

"Gracious Heavens!" ejaculated Mrs. Burgess, "pray, what has been said?" reaching eagerly for the paper. But the Rector waved her off.

"Do you as I bid you!" he replied with a certain dignity. "There is no need to perpetuate these wretched venalities. You will find that the poor misguided girl will be grateful!"

And with this Mrs. Burgess was obliged to retire. The Rector, left alone, then began to ponder the far more serious problem of Lord Carstone. Not that he had any greater difficulty in piecing together the incident as seen from His Lordship's point of view, but that, with perfect judgment, he deliberated most carefully what steps must be taken to secure the ends he personally desired. And so delicate was the matter of approaching the great autocrat, whom a look, a tone, or a word misplaced might cause to take some irrevocable and irreparable decision, that Mr. Burgess was still undecided what to do, when the news of the result of the election arrived.

Truly it was of no assistance to the Rector in forming his decision, but it lent to the reverend gentleman's reflections a feeling of urgency. He could picture so well, on the ground provided by the information he had received, His Lordship's view of the matter. He had no doubt, from the nobleman's manner, as from a hundred small traits of character in his pupil, that the tie between the two was one of blood relationship. He could call up exactly, with his mind trained to reception and reflection, the fastidiousness that would make the peer disdain to acknowledge the relationship, and yet be covertly gratified by seeing the unacknowledged scion of the house

win the laurels of a contest in which he himself would not be discommoded by entering. Mr. Burgess had long known His Lordship for a patron of the stage more than of the other arts, and was far too charitable by creed, and discreet by policy, to inquire as to the exact nature of the interest that he might take in the lady with whom young Theodore's name had been so impertinently, so publicly, so slanderously connected. His Lordship would resent the incident as an intrusion upon his privacy, and had obviously sent the bag-person about her business, hence the unfortunate occurrence to His Lordship's man, Ogle. He had obviously vented his annoyance with Theodore by withdrawing all support from his candidature. Mr. Burgess sighed a little for Ogle, more for Theodore, somewhat for human nature and chiefly for himself. The service of the mighty was truly an onerous task. What imperious, recondite, and indisputable motives would govern His Lordship's next transaction as to Theodore, and thus perfect or destroy the benevolent foresight of the Rector with regard to his niece? Difficulty and caution alike dictated a pause. From the demeanour of the ladies at luncheon, he gathered little, and was careful to make no inquiry. Few strong feelings ever showed themselves on Mrs. Burgess' features. And the girl kept her face so hidden, her tongue so still, that nothing escaped her. The Rector went about his ordinary avocations, the ladies about theirs.

The afternoon light was waning when Jordan came

to tell him that Theodore had returned from the city, and gone up to his room. The faithful servant added his own conclusions, as to the violence from which the young man must have suffered, recounting all the gossip the coachman from the George had imparted, the assault on Theodore, the blood on his stock and coat collar. Nothing roused the Rector so swiftly as physical danger, especially to a member of his household. The agility with which he climbed the stairs, the care with which he knocked at, and opened Theodore's door showed this. On receiving no reply, and hearing nothing but low and regular breathing, he tiptoed away. At the foot of the stairs he was met by the ladies, returned from a short excursion. Unable to conceal the concern depicted on his face, he informed them briefly of the state of affairs, and warned them that the sleeper must not be disturbed. Mrs. Burgess turned aside to speak to Mrs. Jordan, the Rector went to his study. What was his surprise to hear swift steps upon the stairs, as if in direct disobedience to his express injunction. He closed the study door with some indecision. He had never had any direct conflict with Marina. There existed between them an admiration which was mutual, and based on the belief on the part of each that the wishes of the other would never prove an inconvenience. He hesitated between duty and inclination. He was determined by the entry of Mrs. Burgess, finger on lip, mysterious, vastly intrigued.

"She has gone up to him!" exclaimed the lady cryp-

tically. The Rector now knew what to do. His interference — yes, if necessary. His sister-in-law's, no. Let the young things make up their minds. Neither could be driven. This was perhaps the auspicious moment for letting things take their course. He smiled in non-committal fashion and nodded. It proved a long moment, auspicious or not. Mrs. Burgess possessed only that moderate amount of patience that was in proportion to her other virtues. After a mute, stationary silence that lasted how long neither could have said, she brought the Rector back to realities.

"I almost think I had better see if there is anything than can be done for the young man!"

Of course. The proprieties. He nodded again, and Mrs. Burgess left him.

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The climax in the fortunes of the inhabitants of the Rectory, like many another, was followed by an anti-climax. For the whole of the succeeding day, the Rector, at least, was in a state of indecision and increasing perplexity. He was neither enveloped in comfortable indolence, small occupations and small talk, nor in that mysterious entente that seemed to envelop the two young people. He alone had to regard the great world outside, wondering about and trying to estimate the probable course of events at Carstone Place, and even beyond it. The whole day

passed, and when the morrow dawned, he felt that something must be done to clear up the situation. As usual, with those who act reluctantly, innocently, and with care, Providence and human nature did something for him, that relieved him from a portion of burdensome decision. It appeared that Theodore had gone out, and Jordan was able to certify that he had obtained a lift into Easthampton. Then the Rector's course was clear. He invited the ladies to accompany him, with just that touch of autocracy in his tone that was so persuasive, to make a morning call. The carriage was ordered, and in the course of a half-hour of slow but stately progress along the leafless lanes, whose russets and grey were gilded by the oblique winter sunshine, arrived at the Place.

The Rector desired to be admitted to Lord Carstone. He was received by Ogle. Pointing out that he had ladies with him, he received contentedly Ogle's proposal that the housekeeper should conduct them to the gardener, who would show them the winter garden. Thus freed, he made no demur to waiting a few moments while Ogle went to acquaint his Lordship. Ogle, in spite of any vicissitudes, actual or gossip invented, through which he might have passed in His Lordship's service was inscrutable, suave and competent as ever. An invisible but powerful community of interest and intelligence seemed to unite Mr. Burgess with him whenever their glances met; it was almost inevitable in those who, physically and spiritually, minister to the great.

Once more, then, Mr. Burgess traversed the marble corridors, amongst statuary that would have filled a temple, and pictures that might have graced a court. At length, along the vistas of the library, no less imposing in the mild December brightness, that did but half light its heights and recesses, than in candle-lit dusk, he descried a figure, precious, elegant, aloof, and even at the announcement "My Lord, the Reverend Mr. Burgess," seeming as remote and unheeding as if in another sphere.

Mr. Burgess waited. And from whatever Olympus the thoughts of the great man inhabited at that moment, came precise and silvery the modulated tones of the voice that never need be raised or breathless or suppliant.

"A fine morning. The season is too advanced."

Mr. Burgess assented, moving ever so little nearer, making himself ever so little more evident in that alcove of the great apartment, that, formed by two immense bookcases, enclosed a window and fireplace, and permitted a view over acres of enclosed, sheltered and sunken ground, in which His Lordship's horticultural experiments were conducted.

"You are not alone?"

No need, no use to deny it. Mrs. Burgess and Marina could be seen, escorted by the gardener, progressing from hotbed to orangery. He explained the convenience of taking the air while engaged in waiting upon His Lordship. Silence, then politeness, the very slight unbending of the Great, earthward.

Mr. Burgess, unhastening, explanatory, perfectly in his place, and neither above nor below it, acknowledged the condescension. And so on for some moments. Finally, in the proper place and tempo, a thought brisker came the inquiry:

“You have heard how things have gone?”

Mr. Burgess had heard, in the country generally, in the county in particular — including Easthampton, of course. And then, as if recalled to a detail of duty:

“Have you any wishes as to the pupil you entrusted to me?”

A slight pause, then, remote as ever, as if no emotion could be aroused behind the high forehead, prominent eyes, thin lips, that held ever so faint a suggestion that something in the structure of the head of Theodore Carston had been frozen to marble, and fastened on this distinguished figure, that so negligently and delicately concealed its age, came the announcement.

Provision had been made. A colonial secretaryship was within powers of disposal. Banker and lawyer had been made acquainted. Arrangements would not fail to smooth away detail.

Did Mr. Burgess shout, jump, express in any movement or modulation of the voice, what he felt? Not he! Before him, for five hundred years processed the Rectors of Hoake. Behind him, when his time was done, he did not for one moment doubt that, during a further five hundred years they would follow. But true to his holy worldliness, or practical divinity,

he interposed, to say that he believed the young man had formed an attachment. Would His Lordship be pleased to assure himself — a relative by marriage — if considered suitable — ? No sign. Then, as remote as ever, the wish expressed that the ladies might be presented to him.

During the time that it took to acquaint them, through the hierarchy of the place, and conduct them across its echoing pavements, no word passed, and the silence might have weighted upon any man less conscious of well-doing. But when the interval was over, Mr. Burgess had his reward. Mrs. Burgess was at her best on such an occasion. It was one of the few moments of her later years, which served to recall the position she had once held, as a member of a small court of white people, removed by all the privileges, but by none more than by race, from their surroundings. Thus she did not feel abashed, but rather at home, had grace and good sense of long practice return to her. Marina had nothing but her native pride, and unusual beauty. Thus, when, upon the Rector's introduction, they rose from a curtsey, His Lordship looked long and searchingly, remarked upon the weather, trusted they found means to entertain themselves, and allowed it to be inferred that they might withdraw. He even went further; as the Rector followed the ladies, who were being conducted away by obsequiousness in livery, he allowed to escape him:

“Well — very well — Mr. Burgess!”

So that, as the carriage bowled village-ward, between the dripping, brilliant hedges, Mr. Burgess had a feeling of greater spiritual thankfulness than he was often able to conjure up when repeating the words set down to express the emotion. He felt that he had done well — for his sister-in-law, who had already resumed her fussy, indiscriminate clatter; for his niece, who maintained her queenly silence; for young Theodore, whom he genuinely liked and had tried to benefit; and last but not least, for himself, who had escaped from some perplexity and uneasiness without injuring a soul or disturbing his conscience. Far weightier was this, for the Rector, than the dim noise of nations turning in their sleep, and threatening he knew not what unforeseen developments when they might awake.

Nothing, in fact, obtruded upon his contented reverie save the sudden demand of Marina to be set down at the piece of rough glebe land, belonging to the living of Hoake by which they were passing. She refused her mother's proffered company, and nimbly leapt down, making Mr. Burgess wonder for a moment as to what might eventually overtake a young woman who so lightly spurned the advantages of her secluded, sheltered sex. But not for more than a moment. He was relieved and happy, and desired all the world to be so.

Foreign Parts

THE blow, though unexpected, was by no means heavy, and the worst discomfort that Theodore experienced was the blood that ran into his eyes, temporarily blinding him. Had he been by himself, he would have washed it off, and looked for the thrower. But he was still a public character, and the crowding about him which followed the incident, not only reminded him that he was still playing a part before an audience, but effectively prevented him from moving. A doctor was sent for, before he could protest, but the more immediate services of Mrs. Armes were forthcoming. Directly she heard what had occurred, she rushed into the room, followed by two of the "gals," one of whom carried a large basin of water, the other an old sheet. Seizing Theodore's head, where it lay upon the back of the chair to which he had been assisted, she first of all pressed it to her bosom, of the size and consistency of a sofa-end, exclaiming in a loud, hoarse voice, "Lor', what a shame, to treat a poor young gentleman so, the brutes!"

She then savagely upbraided the girls for standing there like that, seized the sheet, tore off a large square of it, and plunging it into the basin, began to scour the open wound in a manner which, although excruciatingly painful, had the merit of cleaning it thoroughly, and of enabling Theodore to see what

was going on. Finally, with much "Lor' "-ing, "There!"-ing, with deep breathing that expelled a rich spirituous steam all about him, she fastened upon his head a species of damp turban, which, whatever else it did, prevented his further appearance in public.

Then Mrs. Armes, after a word with each of the gentlemen, giving her opinion of the election, the opponents, the results, Theodore's mishap, its consequences, and possible progress, took herself off, sending up immediately a large, hot, comforting tumbler of brandy and water. While he was sipping this with relish, Doctor Brighton appeared, portly and decisive, full also of views upon the day's doings, but was eventually constrained to lift the edge of the bandage, hum! and ha! and write a prescription, pocket a guinea and go.

Now Ben came to say that the carriage was ready, and after a curt, preoccupied farewell from Mr. Starchard, and a grudging remote one from Mr. Rampingham, Theodore descended the stair upon Mr. Varley's arm, that he felt unnecessarily but so kindly offered that it could not be refused. Mr. Doughty also accompanied him, and the hands that he shook as he seated himself for the drive were those of the best friends he had made. Varley's last words were: "We shall now see if there are not grounds for a petition!" while the banker expressed the hope that he might know if Mr. Carston were ever in any position in which the firm could render him some slight service.

Theodore left the George by Middens Alley, skirted the Castle Ditches and thus came round to Nether Bargate, half empty, leaving behind him the Blue rejoicings of the Market Place. He sat well back until he was clear of the town, and then, letting down a window, leaned forward, surveying the wet hedgerows, the shining levels of arable, the rich sodden grasslands. The wintry sun broke through, setting a glittering edge on the black branches of the elms, while the rooks wheeled in the pale blue sky.

The cool air, the pleasant view, and most of all, the absence of clamour, strife and concentration of human energy, soothed his excitement, and eased the throbbing of his head. As his mind cleared his spirits did not rise. He had been stunned, mentally and physically. He began to feel his wound. But far more acutely he began to feel the fact that he was returning to Marina, his beloved, not victorious, unheroic, hardly the figure to overcome her vivid jealousy, or satisfy her implied demand for redemption, by deeds, from the disgrace he had incurred in her eyes. So, when the carriage turned in at the familiar gate, and old Jordan opened the door, he balanced his hat as well he might on his unwieldy head-wrappings, and telling the old servant to say he was very tired and would prefer to rest until dinner, made his way quietly and silently up to his room, with a last injunction, thrown over his shoulder, to see that the driver had something.

By this means he gained his room unobserved and

lay down fully dressed upon the bed. In the quiet of the winter dusk, he was beset by a terrible loneliness, child of the excited atmosphere in which he had dwelt so many days, and of the lowered vitality that follows shock. How he wished that she, and she only, would, could now, touch his forehead, perhaps his lips, speak to him, distract him. Tears stood in his eyes. He had failed, he had been beaten, no matter how or why, the stigma clung to him.

Down beneath his window, in the yard by the kitchen, was the drone of voices punctuated by exclamations. Half-conscious and wholly preoccupied, he distinguished the voices of the driver, recounting thus, and of Jordan and his wife, marvelling. This brought, in a roundabout way, comfort to his mind. It had, then, been something striking, nearly epic, in which he had been engaged. Here below was the shepherd, the old man, the messenger, of classic story, telling of great events. He could almost translate, as he listened, "Now proud Ramplingham — now dark Hamilton — so, with martial music mustered the Blues ——" He began to wonder if anything is ever epic until it is past. Such ruminations did not sustain him long. He was too close to the election, had too vivid a memory of noise, smell and confusion — worse, of malign trickery, pomposity masquerading as strength, and ineffective good humour — to see anything grand in it. It was what he had just experienced it to be. No rosy-golden cloud yet obscured its smallness, no well-

placed periods edited its raucous yelling. With the twilight came a sombre mood, partly physical exhaustion, partly the helpless feeling that he had not redeemed himself in Marina's eyes. She had implied that his only chance was to go down into the battle and clear himself thus of all the inferences she had drawn from the newspaper, from her own too personal and peremptory feeling. He had failed. Tears fell from his eyes. He was unaccustomed to helplessness, to finality in defeat. He heard the cheery farewells of the refreshed driver, the grinding of the wheels of the carriage from the George, that seemed to carry away his usual buoyancy, in funereal procession. Never had he needed Marina more than at that moment, never, in the brief hours since he had known her, had she seemed so far away. Listless and inert, he lay back, feeling incapable of rousing himself.

How long elapsed while he sank in this mood, he did not count. He did not even rise to ring for a light or inquire when the other occupants of the Rectory would be home. He might have slept, so completely did he abandon himself. In this half-dreaming state he dimly felt a stir about the house, discreet voices, the opening and shutting of doors. There were steps on the stairs. Kindness and genuine concern mingled with authority in a tap on the door. He did not answer. The door was slowly, softly opened. It was the Rector.

"Theodore!"

He kept quiet. The Rector came as far as the middle of the room, tiptoeing, peering. Theodore watched him through half-closed eyes. With a subdued "Hm" of satisfaction, the tutor turned and departed. Theodore waited, alone in the deepening twilight. Without a sound of warning, without hesitation or precaution, the door was opened and closed. Marina slipped through, easily, lightly as a bird, came straight to him, and kneeled beside him. She had been so quiet about it all that he did not realise the depth of feeling in her, until she had put one arm beneath him, and drawing his head to her shoulder, buried her lips in his.

For a long while they clung so, then drew a little apart. He could see nothing of her but the outline of her cheek and temple, the love-lock that hung there and the light in her eyes, dark-centered but luminous with tears. Such a sense of bliss invaded him, now that he had so far let himself go, that his chief desire was to prolong the infinite comfort of her touch. He said "Beaten!"

"I know, I know!"

Nothing more passed, for neither desired to abbreviate that moment. But outside, the world would not stand still, and movement in the house below told them that dinner was imminent. She asked:

"You are hungry — will you come down?"

"Like this?" he queried ruefully, touching the swathing of his head.

Without a word, she got up, and left him as swiftly,

and quietly as she had come. What she said, what her mother thought, he had no time to imagine, as that lady was next ushered in to him, with candle that made him blink and blush. Mrs. Burgess' timorous matter-of-factness now showed to advantage. She was, above all, a woman of the domestic round, and that round she had learned in circumstances in which she had to do many things, meet many emergencies the inhibitions of more fortunately-situated folk at home leave to those whose business they are. Aided by Marina, she uncovered the wound, pressing upon it some foreign herbs of which she had a store, bathed it, with flat-voiced commonplaces of concern, and bound it up in more seemly shape. Then, as though the proprieties, never more strict than in the Rectory of Hoake, had suddenly stalked towards her like revengeful ghosts, she withdrew, saying to her daughter:

"Come, Marina, we must leave Mr. Carston to change his cravat!" She, with the bustling alacrity of a widow of the clergy, Marina with one liquid glance backward, left him.

At such bidding what else could he do, but make his toilet, and rather shakily, what with emotion and shock, find his way downstairs? But in the dining-room the proprieties stood behind the Rector's chair, as though personified by Jordan, and the conversation took to its habitual equable vacuity as though there had been no election, no sudden irruption into his room of that temeritous, lovely, unaccountable

creature; he was thankful enough, he had had sufficient disturbance for one day.

The Rector made no reference to his own journey upstairs, but seemed to have some extra self-contained source of devout urbanity that night. So in the mild candle glow, and unadventurous chatter, the evening passed, and Theodore went to bed in the silence and comfort of the Rectory.

So beneficial was the change, so buoyant his youth, that the morning found him with a certain lightness in the head, but no headache, nor lasting effects. He found ample and pleasant employment in accompanying the ladies as far as Mayley Castle. In the afternoon, he hoped that some lucky accident would enable him to speak intimately all the urgent things he had to say to Marina, but he was disappointed; Mrs. Burgess had no letters to write that day, as it was not Sunday, and therefore remained close beside her daughter. That daughter, even, seemed to be a different woman from that of the day before. As he loitered in the drawing-room, yawning over the slow passage of the time, Theodore stole covert glances at her, failed to elicit any hint of her feelings from the expression of her face, and racked his brains for any plausible excuse to induce her to come elsewhere with him. It now seemed incredible that she was the same person who had come to him only twenty-four hours before, so bravely and tenderly, on the evening of his defeat.

He found, also, that he had profoundly changed.

The election had absorbed and excited him more than he knew. Strange and irksome as the narrow streets and perplexing assemblies of the town had been, he now missed them, wondered about them; his brief elevation to public scrutiny had given him a vague ambition, an importance that he now lacked. A call from the Misses Landover, respectable maiden ladies of some property, who lived in the Dell House at the other end of the village, a visit from Dr. Brighton, to inquire for his health, passed the time without yielding any satisfaction. The dazzling afternoon afforded no chance of mild sport with Jordan, the prospect of an evening passed before the fire, about a table occupied at best by cribbage, seemed interminable. He sought in vain for the quiet contentment of the private life he had laid aside at a word from His Lordship, and from which he was now separated by a week that might have been a decade. His attention wandered, and he made evasive and halting replies to the small questions and wonderments of Mrs. Burgess. Marina sat sulkily silent, the Rector had gone to his study. Theodore tried to trace what it was he had lost — to find his way back to that brilliant path of public duty and legislative progress in which he had believed himself to be embarked. But instead of it, there rose before him the shuttered tortuousness of old Mr. Statchard, the venial ambition of Ramplingham, the cross-currents of Allday or His Lordship, the kind but gently ineffective friendliness of Doughty and Varley. Beyond them —

what? A fog, a dense mistiness in which moved some unknown and incomprehensible being, that average elector he had never managed to visualise, the average man of Easthampton whom he had never been allowed contact with, beyond official contact dictated by the agent, the indigenous animal of the English political jungle whom he had never been able to identify with any one of those with whom he had shaken hands, passed a formal word, or of whom he had had sight only as in other avocations, or as a mob, swayed by motives that were unaccountable to him. He began to wonder, first at the two thousand odd men who had cast their votes for him — for what purpose? Had they any purpose, or had they all too surely some small personal device to further? And beyond them — who were, after all, but a tiny fraction of the occupants of the Market Place, and the town that encircled it — what utter darkness was there? Yet he was conscious enough that history was being made, a great change in progress, and that one day, the incidents of the struggle in which his name had been bandied about, his appearance cheered or hooted, in which he had for some short days been the figurehead of the party, would be chronicled in the page of history, and given a meaning which, by his very nearness, was still obscured from him.

Now came the candles, then Jordan asking if anything more were required, the parting advice of Mrs. Burgess as to bathing his head, Marina's listless hand and downcast eye. Fortunate was he

that youth and health soon compelled him to sleep.

Next morning his feelings were confirmed and strengthened. His wound had ceased to pain him, his head had cleared, he was rested, even restless. He said nothing to anybody, but immediately after breakfast, slipped out, to the New Inn, that largest in the village, to see if any one were going in the direction of Easthampton from whom he might beg a lift. He soon found that the butcher would be going, and so, in his oldest coat, his collar well up, he mounted beside the blue apron and moleskin cap of his conductor, and was carried towards the town at the smart trot of a sturdy piebald pony.

It was not until he arrived in sight of the houses, the people, felt once more about him the concentrated and reacting life of the town, that he recalled the very different circumstances in which he had last entered it. He looked about him shyly, half hoping, half dreading to be recognised by some erstwhile Buff supporter. No one appeared to notice him. The election seemed to have passed from men's minds like last summer's thunderstorms. The trades were plying, the shops open, the streets filled with leisurely habitual traffic. It was not until he came into the Market Place, and saw the workmen replacing glass in the windows of the King's Head, and re-setting cobble-stones among the now crowding stalls, that he could find any visible sign of what had passed. He desired to be set down at the corner of the Parade, and made his way to the George on foot.

The yard was nearly empty and very quiet. He could not see Mrs. Armes in the Snug, but a waiter directed him to the Little Assembly. He mounted the stair and soon heard the landlady's voice, ordering some one about. Passing along the passage he found her with two maids and an individual he had some difficulty in recognising as Ben the ostler. He did so more by clothes than features, for one eye was closed, the other bloodshot, the forehead was decorated with plaster, over a swelling the size of an egg, and the mouth all out of shape. This figure passed him without a word, carrying a roll of Buff drapings that were, apparently, being stored away until the next occasion on which they might be required.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Armes!"

The landlady turned and perceived him, and it was at once evident that she was in her morning mood, when the after-effects of yesterday constrained her to criticism and energy, until to-day softened her to indolence and approbation.

"Well, young man! What do you want?"

"What has happened to Ben?"

"You can see for yourself, I should think!"

"How did it happen?"

"On your account. I'm in two minds whether to charge you for it in the bill. But that's all the same to you, I suppose, so long as others pays!"

"What is there due from me?"

"Half a day's work. Ben found out that Dan, from the King's Head, had been spyin' on your

goin's on, at Hoake, and that's how he managed to bamboozle you. So Ben caught him at the pump in the mornin', and they were at it for three-corters of an hour. A proper mill, it was, with a ring formed and Armes keepin' time, and old Saint sendin' for the constable, who daren't interfere!"

"Ben won?"

"Well, they carried Dan off, and he ain't been seen again, so far, and the King's Head people are talking about a summons for assault, but that 'on't go far!"

"I must give Ben a guinea!"

Mrs. Armes seemed mollified, but whether by the spirit he showed, or pride in Ben, or because the two maids now returned to say that "That was all done!" meaning that the last of the Buff trappings were safely bestowed, thus permitting her to seat herself in the Snug and have something to take, he could not tell. Certainly she did not intend to be delayed in arriving at this satisfactory conclusion, and asked impatiently what else he might want.

"I came to see Mr. Statchard."

"Then you've come to the wrong place. This isn't his office. You know where it is!"

Theodore bowed and left her. A few minutes' brisk walk brought him to the old house in Bishopgate. The door was open, this time, the room looking into the street, marked "Mr. Statchard's Clerks," was occupied by an inky boy with long hair, and a very old man with none, both writing. He gave his name to the boy, who grinned and went with it

through a door marked "Private." That grin spoke volumes. Nothing he had yet encountered gave Theodore so clear a vision of the distance that separates a defeated candidate from a potential Member of Parliament.

He was ushered into the study, of bleaker and more dusty appearance by daylight than when he had last seen it. The old lawyer was seated at the table with Vardigans, nodded and pointed to a chair, and resumed with his clerk the scrutiny of the books spread out before them that Theodore's entry had interrupted. It ran thus, and Theodore could see sufficient of the books to understand what he overheard:

STATCHARD: "St. Thomas by the Water!"

VARDIGANS: "That's the last Parish!"

STATCHARD: "The Freemen are all right!"

VARDIGANS: "Ours are. But Worstead promised Them, and we got Jarvis to send him out of town!"

STATCHARD (smiling faintly): "As far as Newton! No Committee would pass it!"

VARDIGANS: "Then, if you look at the occupiers. There's two of Saint's. He promised repairs, but he will have Gotobed, and Gotobed is Blue!"

STATCHARD: "He thinks it increases custom. Ramplingham is just as bad!"

VARDIGANS: "Worse, sir. And tells all the town. He threatened Comer's old mother. You heard what the old lady said?"

STATCHARD (grimly): "No!"

VARDIGANS (mimicking): "You come inside here,

Mr. Ramplingham. Now, sir, there's the clock. If you should drop half a guinea inside the case, and I showed it to Comer, he might do as you wish! Ramplingham did it, and they'd got a man on the stairs all the time! All the boys shouted, 'What's o'clock?' after him in the Market Place!"

STATCHARD: "All wind!"

VARDIGANS: "A man of his age not to know better!"

STATCHARD: "Does he still visit the ferry?"

VARDIGANS: "Not so much since he found he wasn't the only fancy man there!"

STATCHARD: "Ah! — and the freeholders?"

VARDIGANS: "Hibbard, Toplin and Arnup had means of us. On the other hand, Margetts ought never to have been allowed to vote."

STATCHARD: "No deeds!"

VARDIGANS: "He's mad. Believes all men are equal and needn't work!"

STATCHARD: "We could object to him. Why is Peyton the hot-presser left blank?"

VARDIGANS: "They cooped him!"

STATCHARD: "One to us. Now, how many does that make in all — ?"

VARDIGANS (adding): "Twelve, fourteen, sixteen, eighteen — twenty-one against us — seventeen for, only!"

STATCHARD (shutting the book): "Well!"

The two men, master and clerk, raised their heads. The elder wiped his spectacles, the younger stretched his vigorous limbs, cramped by application at the

table. They had the air of those by whom a job has been well done.

Theodore, meanwhile, had been withholding his impatience. To have descended from being a candidate to being a client who waited, was galling enough, and he had the sense of injustice that assails any man to whom temporary elevation has rendered a previous obscurity impossible of resumption. He felt not merely slighted. He felt an indignation as though the quiet old man and the authoritative younger one had slighted the whole town, as if their grip of the machinery of public representation were spread over the roofs and open spaces of Easthampton like a strawberry net. He said sharply:

“Well, gentlemen?”

As if pricking his ears at the tone, Mr. Statchard replied:

“Well, young man?”

“What steps do we take next?”

Mr. Statchard shook his head. Vardigans smiled. Theodore pressed:

“I am informed there will be a petition!”

The same pantomime. Theodore grew furious and rose.

“I expect the Committee will have something to say to this!”

“The Committee will act as I advise,” said the calm old voice. Vardigans, nearer in years, less in prestige, seemed to make an appeal to his sportsmanship.

“Come, Mr. Carston, what’s the use of our trying

to upset the Blues when they have really more cause to upset us?"

It was upon Theodore's lips to cry, "Who made this dirty bargain, who got us into this mud?" but the hopelessness of it, the uncertainty of youth and inexperience before obstinacy and long use, and above all, a sudden gust of hatred of the close air, the bookish outlook, the confinement of the dust-laden, paper-filled place, made him rise with all the dignity he could muster, give them a curt "Good-day, gentlemen!" and depart. He could feel the clerks in the outer office regarding him with something between wonder and relief as he stalked through, slammed the outside door behind him and strode up Bishopgate. Where would he go? What would he do? Visit Mr. Varley and then make off, right away somewhere. He remembered that he was short of money, and bent his steps towards the Bank. As he made to ask at the counter for Mr. Doughty, that very person beckoned to him from the door of the Parlour. Entering, he found his friend with Mr. Varley and the old chief clerk. At their mute invitation he flung himself into a chair.

He could not maintain this attitude long, for both his friends were smiling, while the old clerk was paying no attention to him whatever. At last it was Mr. Varley who broke the silence.

"Well!"

"I have been to Mr. Statchard's. There will be no petition!"

The two friends exchanged a smile. Mr. Varley touched Theodore's shoulder, while the banker took some papers from his pocket.

"We expected nothing else!" And as Theodore looked up, Mr. Varley continued:

"From what we have learned, there will be no Reform in Easthampton, until the Bill is passed."

"And no Bill can be passed unless Easthampton and its like vote for it?"

Here they both laughed. But Mr. Varley continued:

"The facts would seem so. But actually the feeling of the country is for Reform, and it will be passed!"

"However, that is not the immediate personal concern of yourself. What are your plans?"

Theodore made a gesture. "Away, out of this, anywhere!" and then laughed: "Without discourtesy — I wish I were a hundred miles away!"

He half caught a meaning look between the two. Mr. Doughty spoke:

"I have just been to see Lord Carstone, with whom I had business. He authorised me to offer you the Secretaryship of St. Christophers if you will sail at once."

Theodore held fast to the arms of the chair. The room seemed to go round. When it had stopped, he sprang to his feet, and seized his hat.

"How long does the offer remain open?"

"Oh — a reasonable time — say a week!"

"Give me an hour!" he cried, running from the room.

He had not traversed half the banking hall before he was stopped by one of the clerks, and found Mr. Doughty hastening after him.

"Our Mr. Dormer reminds me to say, that in the event of your desiring to accept the offer, we should be most happy to provide you with a letter of introduction to our friends there!"

Theodore nodded, crammed on his hat and ran. At the George, Ben, half-blinded and stiff, was leading in a horse that, by its appearance, had already done a good morning's work.

Theodore seized the bridle, pressed a guinea into the ostler's hand, vaulted into the saddle, and kicking the unwilling beast in the ribs, had it out of the yard and halfway up Bargate before any one could stop him. His feelings had mastered him. He, usually so gentlemanly towards a horse, forced on his mount. Fortunately the road was soft and the morning cool.

There was a piece of glebe land belonging to the living of Hoake, that, leg-of-mutton-shaped, bramble-and-gorse-filled, came down to the high road against the water-splash of a little stream. The better land on either side had long been alienated, but this odd piece remained. Many a time had Theodore enjoyed a morning's rough shooting there with Jordan, and instinctively he turned his head, as a young man will, toward a place of pleasurable associations. What he saw there was no opportune hare, no stray

pheasant. The lavender pelisse, the pale blue hat could only belong to one being, and that the one in all the world whom he desired most chiefly to meet. Wrenching his horse round, he set it at the low, stiff hedge, cared nothing for the style in which it blundered through. The grass by the stream was sodden and treacherous, the gorse high and thorny. He cared nothing, but forced his way along.

When he came up with her, amid the half-dozen oaks that crowned a low bank, she had long heard the sound of his coming, and stood, unafraid and unconfused, to meet him. He flung himself from his horse, tossed away his bridle, and caught her in his arms. Her cheek was cold and firm, her eye deep and unwavering, her forehead serene. He blurted out his news and she permitted herself a smile, but a very subdued one. He plied her with entreaty, supplication, exhortation. Would she come with him, he loved her, he would never love any one else, would she fly with him?

For answer, holding his eager hand, she turned him toward the gate. He gathered up the bridle and put it over his arm. As they walked, thus linked, the uncertain, diluted English winter sun shone on them, beatifically. At the Rectory, Theodore gave the horse to Jordan, who received it, and made no comment on their clasped hands. They broke into the Rector's study with a hasty knock, and stood like truant school-children, finding it difficult to say what they had to say. The Rector exclaimed, wiped his

spectacles, sent for Mrs. Burgess, who wept, and the whole household became enveloped, even through lunch, even to the servants, in a weak, indecorous levity.

Jordan rode the horse back, with a note of acceptance to Mr. Doughty.

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A month later, Theodore and Marina stood among the coiled ropes, straining canvas, and solid wood-work on the sailing-ship *Liberty* (Captain Catchpole) that made its way gingerly out of the crowded and awkward harbour of Seaton. They were keeping in sight, as long as possible, the figures on the quay-head, that, growing indistinct, they knew to be Mrs. Burgess, the Rector, Mr. Doughty and Mr. Varley, with whom they had lunched. As the harbour widened and the figures diminished, they found themselves the centre of no little bustle, occasioned by hoarsely-bawled orders, and composed of the running about of men in dark blue clothes, who hauled upon ropes with cheery cries. One of these men, passing before them, looked up, saw Theodore, and backed away as though he had seen a spectre. Theodore would have questioned him, the boatswain threatened awful things in strong, sea-going tongue, but the man reached the taffrail, vaulted over it into the sea. Amid strenuous exertion and some confusion the ship was hove to, a boat manned, but the runaway had soon been picked up by one of the innumerable fishing craft in the crowded waters, and

could be seen frantically arguing with his rescuers, who set him ashore at one of the small jetties of the place, where he was immediately lost in the crowded wharves and yards. Captain Catchpole, annoyed more than astounded, having called the purser, heard the man's name and description, and hailed vainly the rescuing boat, which also made off and lost itself in the moored flotilla of fishing and coast-wise craft, reluctantly gave the order to carry on.

Theodore alone knew what had happened. That brutish, downcast face he had seen before, in a dream, a dark moment, in some experience he could not properly recall or describe. But it was more than that. The face of the renegade seaman symbolised for him all that underworld of half-developed, wholly instinctive humanity at present too base and inarticulate for the formal quasi-democracy that professed to give voice to its aspirations. He failed entirely to quell his young wife's astonishment and interest, for he, no more than any other, could explain the primitive animal workings of the mind of all that submerged existence that was not yet even seeking expression, but that could by its thoughtless violence do so much to mar the frail edifice of civilised communion that mankind had so laboriously built.

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